

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JUNE 1980



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MURDER IN PARADISE

The New Mike Shayne Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Novelets by

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and LEWIS SHINER

Short Stories by

JOSEPH COMMINGS

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ED NOON'S

MINUTE MYSTERIES

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A New MIKE SHAMUS

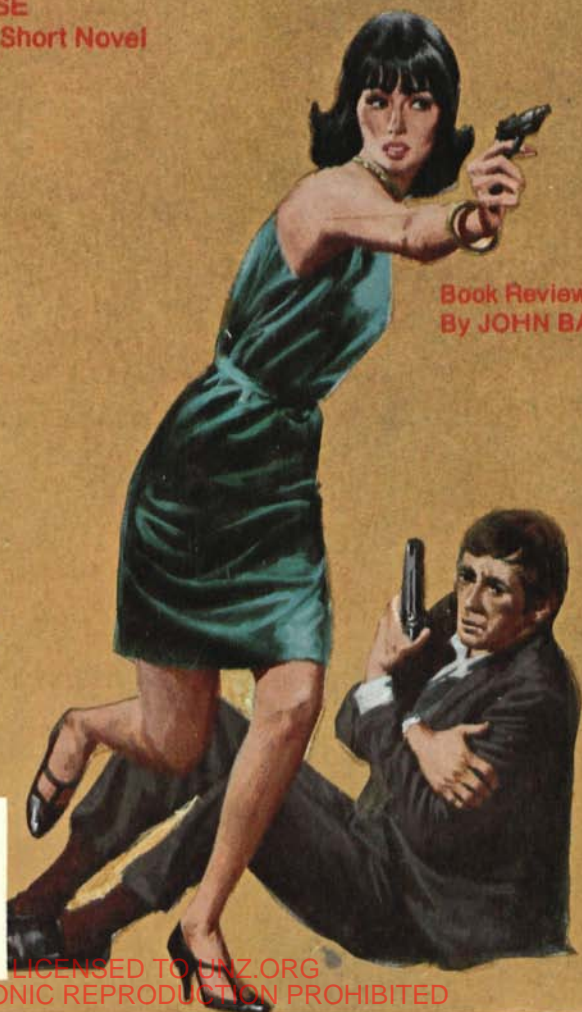
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MURDER IN PARADISE

by Brett Halliday

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The Mexican police officer smiled wolfishly. "Now, Shayne, you will find out what we really think of arrogant gringos who try to interfere with our processes of law!" The man slipped off his metal-studded belt. Shayne knew he was in for a beating, and there was nothing he could do to prevent it. 5

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAKERS

Well, we have a pretty good issue for you this time, considering the disasters that took place. Fortunately, we have some good people here to console us in our time of need.

MIKE AVALLONE is one of them. Justly called "The Fastest Typewriter in the East," he's written occult, gothics, science-fiction, adventure, mysteries, etc., etc., etc. under his own and a variety of pen and house names. The creator of the famous *Ed Noon*, Mike is currently furnishing MSMM with *Ed Noon's Minute Mysteries*, an example of which is in this issue. On tap also is a short story which will appear in the near future.

Also on board is the incredibly prolific EDWARD D. HOCH, whose list of credits could fill all our pages if we let it. He's published five novels, six short story collections, twice been an anthology editor, done television adaptations, written and sold five hundred short stories and novelets to major magazines. In 1968 he received the coveted Edgar Award for best mystery short story.

W.L. FIELDHOUSE spent two and a half years as a member of S-2 U.S. Army Intelligence in Germany, an experience which provided him with authentic background for his series of novelets about Major Clifford Lansing of the CID. He recently sold an action-western novel entitled *Klaw*, and with another writer is developing a new action-adventure series for Pinnacle Books.

Because of last-minute space problems *Mike's Mail* got squeezed out, but look for it next issue. Meanwhile, there's some good reading here. Hope you enjoy it.

—CEF

Murder In Paradise



by Brett Halliday

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MIKE SHAYNE leaned an elbow on his desk, pulled at his left earlobe, and frowned at the paper spread out on his desk. There was a pen clutched in his big, knobby hand, and he was hard at work on the aspect of his profession that he liked least — making reports.

Shayne had been a private detective for a long time. He would have been hard pressed to say why exactly he had chosen it for a career. He knew that he enjoyed the constant contact with people from all walks of life, and the inherent excitement of the profession could be highly exhilarating at times. Not to mention the fact that he made a good, steady living at it. But while he enjoyed being out on the street, poking, probing, sometimes putting his life on the line, there

was still one inescapable fact.

Paperwork was the pits.

He put the pen down and ran his fingers through his coarse red hair, then leaned back in his chair and tipped a cigarette into his mouth. Taking a break might make the words flow easier. The client for whom he was making the report was a large insurance company, and the case he had just wrapped up had been loaded with confusing, sometimes boring details.

The only trouble with that was, before Shayne could even start to relax, there was a commotion in the outer office.

He heard his secretary, Lucy Hamilton, exclaim, "Wait a minute! You can't just go barging —"

The door between the offices

banged open. Shayne came to his feet in a fluid motion, planting his feet and waiting for whatever was going to happen next.

A man stepped into the office. He was so tall that the top of his head almost hit the top of the door, and he was broad enough to fill it. Surprisingly, his voice was high and rather gentle as he asked, "Are you Mike Shayne?"

"That's right," Shayne answered tightly. "Can I help you?"

"I'm supposed to bring you."

Shayne frowned. "Bring me where?"

"With me."

Shayne stepped out from behind his desk slowly. There seemed to be a certain vacantness about the visitor, and Shayne wondered if there was something wrong with him mentally. The man didn't look particularly dangerous, despite his size, with his broad, doughy face and fair hair.

Shayne saw Lucy's lovely face peeking around from behind the behemoth in the door. She said, "I tried to stop him, Michael, but —"

"Don't worry about it, Angel," Shayne said. "I doubt if anyone could keep our friend here from going wherever he wanted."

"Okay," the man said heavily. "Enough talk. You're going with me, Shayne."

Shayne shook his red head emphatically. "I don't think so. Not until you tell me where we're going and what it's about."

"I don't know nothin' about that. All I know is you got to come with me."

Shayne had his feet braced solidly on the floor, but it didn't do any good. The big man reached out, clamped a huge hand down on Shayne's arm, and pulled.

Shayne's feet came off the floor.

"Dammit!" Shayne rapped. This game had gone on long enough. It was time to change the rules.

He used the momentum that the man's pull had given him and put it behind a rock-hard fist. Shayne slammed the blow into the man's stomach and jerked his other arm loose.

The big man shook his head, looked down at his stomach, and then looked back up at Shayne. "I didn't know you were gonna hit me," he said. "Nobody told me about that."

Lucy's voice came from the outer office, a note of sanity in a situation that had taken a slightly lunatic air. "Do you want me to call the police, Michael?"

Shayne took a half-step backward, watching the big man intently. He kept his fists ready, but he said, "No, Angel, we'll handle this for now. Our friend here has me curious."

The big man sighed and pointed a blunt finger at Shayne. "You're gonna get me in trouble, you know that? I'm just trying to do my job, Shayne."

"I told you . . . I'm not going

anywhere until I know what it's about."

The big man nodded glumly. "All right. Nobody said you had to be conscious."

That was all the warning Shayne had, and it wasn't enough. The man dove at him with speed that was stunning in a bruiser of his size.

Shayne tried to duck aside from the lunge, but one looping arm caught him. He heard Lucy cry out as he was borne backwards, and then he crashed into the desk.

The man had his other arm around him now. Shayne drove punches into his midsection, but the range was too close for the blows to have much power. The arms started to tighten around Shayne.

Gasping for breath as the grip began to crush him, Shayne snapped the heel of his hand against the man's chin, driving his head back. With his other hand, Shayne punched sharply at the man's kidneys.

Lucy danced into the office then, a heavy glass ashtray uplifted in her hand. She waited for a moment, then darted in, smashing the ashtray down on the big man's head. Shayne saw his eyes glaze over momentarily, but the grip on his ribs didn't relax.

Shayne had never been a dirty fighter, but sometimes the situation warranted whatever means were necessary. And if he didn't break that hold in a few seconds,

he was going to have some broken ribs.

He brought his knee up savagely.

The man gasped and Shayne felt his arms loosen just enough. The detective drove his arms out to the sides, breaking the grip. Shayne threw a hard punch to the man's belly, enough to make him stagger back a step. That room was all Shayne needed.

He launched an uppercut almost from the floor. It whistled into the man's jaw, landing with a smash. The man's arms flew out as he struggled to retain his balance, but he couldn't stop his backward flight. Lucy leaped out of his way like she was avoiding a runaway truck, and the wall of the office intervened. The man crashed into it, hung there for a moment, then slid down it slowly to collapse in a heap on the floor.

Shayne stood there, trying to catch his breath and massaging bruised knuckles. Lucy looked wide-eyed from the man on the floor to her big redheaded boss, and then said, "Michael, *what the hell was that all about?*"

Shayne shook his head. "I don't know," he growled, "but I intend to find out. You can call the cops now."

Lucy stepped into the outer office. Shayne started to sit down behind his desk again, but then Lucy called out, "Michael." He could tell by the tone of her

voice that something else was wrong.

His face set in taut, grim lines, Shayne went to the door between the offices. Lucy was standing beside her desk, her hand hovering in mid-air over the phone. Standing in the door, glaring at them, was a man who was a lot smaller than their first visitor.

But the gun in his hand went a long way toward evening things up.

"Where's Alvin?" the man snapped.

He was short and pudgy, but not in a way that made him look soft. Dark brows hung over darker eyes, but that was all the hair on his head. He held the gun like he knew how to use it.

Shayne might have gone for his own gun if he had been wearing it, but he had taken the shoulder rig off when he arrived at the office that morning. Now, all he could do was point carefully.

"If you're talking about a big throwback who tried to kidnap me, he's in there, sleeping off his mistake."

The baldheaded man frowned. "You mean you took Alvin out? Hell, you must be the right man for the job, then."

Shayne's own brow creased into a frown. "You mean you're the one who sent him after me?"

"Well, I didn't tell him to kidnap you, if that's what you mean. I just told him to fetch you."

"I don't fetch too easy," Shayne glowered. "You mind telling me where you both escaped from?"

The man scratched his head, then seemed to suddenly remember that he was pointing a gun at them. He asked, "You are Mike Shayne, aren't you?"

"That's right," Shayne answered patiently.

The man reached behind his back, shoved the gun into his belt, and then stuck out his hand. "T.J. Wilkerson," he declared. "I'd like to hire you, Shayne."

Shayne returned the handshake rather dubiously, motioned for Lucy to sit down and relax, and then said, "You've got a strange way of hiring a man, Wilkerson. That goon of yours would give most people nightmares."

"Maybe so," Wilkerson agreed. "But people don't give me much trouble when he's around. You see, Shayne, I like to carry large sums of money. Alvin is my way of feeling secure."

"That's why you carry a gun, too?"

"You betcha."

Shayne took a deep breath. If nothing else, this hectic intrusion had taken him away from that dull report he was struggling with. He said, "All right, Wilkerson. Come on inside and tell me all about it."

He stepped aside to let Wilkerson precede him into the inner office. Lucy looked at him quizzically, and he raised his brawny

shoulders in a shrug, then followed Wilkerson.

Wilkerson was making himself comfortable in the client's chair in front of the desk. Shayne stepped over the outstretched legs of the unconscious Alvin and settled down in his own chair.

"All right, tell me about it," he said. "And start with why you sent that gorilla up here after me."

Wilkerson reached inside his coat and came out with a cigar that looked like a miniature log and jammed it into his mouth. He said around it, "In my business, people come to me. Guess I'm just used to it. So when I want something, I send Alvin to fetch whoever I need. I guess you don't work that way, though."

"You guess right. Although I will go to a client . . . if he's polite about it."

Wilkerson's fat hand delved inside his coat again and came out with a bundle of money, the bills held together by a thick rubber band. He tossed it on the desk and said, "That polite enough for you?"

Shayne glanced at the visible bill on top of the stack, saw that it was a thousand, and said, "If the rest of them match that one, you've got a lot of money there."

"All them babies look just like their mama, Shayne. And there's twenty-five of them."

Shayne leaned back and rasped a thumbnail along his jawline.

"What do you want that's worth twenty-five grand?" he asked.

"I want you to go to Acapulco," Wilkerson asked. "I want you to investigate a murder." His fingers knotted together, and for the first time, Shayne saw real tension in the man's face.

After a moment of consideration, Shayne said, "I don't carry any weight in Mexico, Wilkerson. My PI ticket doesn't mean a damn thing there."

Wilkerson leaned forward eagerly. "I've heard of you, Shayne. You're tough, and you're honest. Hell, if you can put Alvin down for the count, you're the toughest son of a bitch I've run across in a long time. And that's just the kind of man I need."

Shayne knew that he could throw Wilkerson out of the office, but something about the little man's attitude made him want to know more. He wanted to know what could cause desperation in a man who was so obviously used to controlling everything around him.

"You said something about a murder. Who's dead?"

Wilkerson's face flushed slightly. "A little no-account gambler named Enriques."

"You sound like you didn't care for him very much."

"Never met the man. But you gotta find out who killed him."

"Why?"

"Because the Mexican cops say that my little baby girl did it,

and you're the only hope she's got of staying out of prison, Shayne."

II

SHAYNE SAT BACK, lit a cigarette, and studied T.J. Wilkerson's face. It didn't look so brash anymore. It looked more worried than anything.

"All right," Shayne nodded. "I might just look into it for you. Why don't you tell me about it?"

"That's one of the problems, Shayne. I don't know hardly anything about it. I just got word late last night. I sent my lawyer down there right away, and this morning I decided to hire you, too. Stanley's pretty good at the legal stuff, but he can't put the fear of God into them Mexican cops."

"Your daughter has been arrested, though, is that right?"

"That's right. Her name's Randi, and she's twenty years old, and she wouldn't kill nobody, I know that. The cops got her in jail and they say she killed this Enriques character, but I know better. All you got to do is go down there and find out who really did it."

"Sure, piece of cake," Shayne muttered dryly.

"That twenty-five thousand's yours if you take the job."

"What if I was to find out that your daughter is really guilty?"

Wilkerson shook his head. "No

way, Shayne. I can't even conceive of it."

Shayne picked up the money and riffled through it. "This is a pretty good piece of change," he said.

Wilkerson waved a hand. "Chickenfeed compared to my little girl."

Shayne slapped the money back down on the desk. He said, "All right, you've hired yourself a detective. On one condition."

"What's that?"

"I don't manufacture evidence, or suppress it, either. I'll get you the facts. I'll find the killer. Even if it is your daughter."

Wilkerson nodded sharply. "Good enough. Randi's innocent, Shayne; I'm not worried about that. All I want is to get her out of that jail as fast as possible."

"I'll be on the next flight out."

Wilkerson stood up, shook hands again, and said, "Thanks, Shayne. I knew you were the fellow I needed."

"There's one more thing I'm curious about."

"Yeah?"

Shayne pointed to the money. "Where did that come from?"

Wilkerson smiled. "It's not dirty money, Shayne, and it's not counterfeit." For a second, his pride shone through his anxiety. "I got me a couple dozen of them fast-food joints all up and down the state and down in the Keys. You never heard of T.J.'s Gatorburgers? Course, we don't

use real gators, that's a good way to get in trouble with the law . . ."

Wilkerson was rambling on as he went out into the outer office, and Shayne called after him, "You forgot something, didn't you?"

"I did?"

Shayne pointed silently at Alvin's recumbent form.

"Oh, yeah." Wilkerson came back into the office, stooped and grabbed Alvin's collar, and started to shake him. "Come on, Alvin, wake up. We got things to do, and so has Shayne."

Alvin shook his head groggily and sat up. When he saw Shayne, he started to surge up from the floor, but Wilkerson's hand on his shoulder stopped him. "Now take it easy, Alvin," Wilkerson said. "Shayne and me already talked business, and he's working for me, just like I wanted."

That explanation seemed to satisfy Alvin. His face settled back into blandness, and he followed Wilkerson out of the office like a puppy, albeit a very big puppy. Lucy watched them go with confusion on her face, then asked, "What's going on here, Michael?"

"Murder. Wilkerson's daughter is in jail in Acapulco, and he wants me to get her out. A man named Enriques is dead, and that's just about all I know."

"You took the case?"

Shayne held up the bundle of money. "There's twenty-five

thousand dollars in it, Angel. And don't let Wilkerson's exterior fool you. This business is tearing him up. I'd kind of like to help him, even if he and Alvin are a little bit . . . unusual."

Lucy's pretty eyebrows arched. "I'd say downright weird."

Shayne slapped the money against his palm and then noticed the piece of paper on the bottom. It wasn't one of the thousand dollar bills, but rather a plain piece of paper with the name *Stanley Francks* on it, and also the words *Olympia Hotel, Acapulco*. "Wilkerson's lawyer," Shayne grunted. "We'll get in touch with him at this Olympia Hotel."

"We?"

Shayne's rugged face split in a grin. "Go home and pack a bag, Angel. I'll make the plane reservations. This case shouldn't take long, and then we'll get a little Mexican vacation, courtesy of T.J.'s Gatorburgers."

Lucy made a face. "Oh, Michael! Is that who Wilkerson was? Those things are awful!"

Shayne laughed.

This beat the hell out of writing reports.

III

IT TOOK A LITTLE MORE convincing before Lucy agreed that the office could stand being closed down for a few days, but that afternoon, she and Shayne

were on a jetliner, racing the sun westward. They changed planes in Mexico City, and another forty-five minutes brought them to Acapulco.

This wasn't Shayne's first visit, but he was still struck by the beauty of the place. He was used to the sea, but the rocky cliffs surrounding the beaches of Acapulco Bay were quite a contrast to Miami. The beachfront itself, with its rows of luxury hotels, struck a familiar chord within Shayne. He could almost feel like he was back in Miami Beach again, with its hustle and bustle of tourists. The liquid babble of Spanish was more dominant here, though.

Shayne retrieved their luggage in the airport terminal and then rented a car. Lucy looked at him and then at the busy boulevard outside. "You're sure you want to drive in that?" she asked.

"The taxi drivers here are all descended from pirates who were washed up in the bay hundreds of years ago. We'll manage."

"You're the boss, Michael," she said dubiously.

The clerk at the rental desk gave him directions to the Olympia Hotel, which was one of the newer ones down close to the beach. Shayne navigated deftly through the slightly berserk traffic and got them there safely.

The hotel was dazzlingly white and rose several stories. There would be a fine view of the beach

and the bay from the upper floors. Shayne hoped that they would have a vacancy, since Stanley Francks was evidently headquartered there.

Shayne had deposited most of T.J. Wilkerson's money and changed the rest to travelers' checks. It took a flash of that roll to convince the desk clerk in the Olympia's vast lobby that he did indeed have an available suite.

When they had checked in, Shayne asked the clerk, "Is Stanley Francks staying here?"

"I believe so, sir."

"What room is he in?"

The man looked slightly embarrassed. "We normally do not give out such —"

"It's important. Just ring him, all right?"

The clerk spoke to the switchboard operator in rapid Spanish. A moment later, he said, "Mr. Francks is in, Mr. Shayne. You can take the call in that first booth over there."

Shayne nodded his thanks and turned to Lucy. "You go on up to the suite with the bellboy and the luggage," he said. "I'll be there as soon as I've set up a meeting with Francks."

"All right, Michael."

Shayne strode over to the row of phone booths, entered the first one, and picked up the phone. He said, "Stanley Francks?"

A man's voice on the other end answered, "Yes. Who is this, please?"

"My name is Mike Shayne. T.J. Wilkerson came to see me this morning in Miami, and now I need to see you."

There was a slight intake of breath on Francks' end. "Is this about Randi?"

"That's right."

"I seem to recognize your name..."

"I'm a private detective."

"Of course! Mr. Wilkerson spoke about hiring someone to investigate this. You're here in Acapulco?"

"I'm in the lobby of the hotel. Can I see you right away?"

"Certainly. How about if I meet you in the bar in fifteen minutes? It's called the Jasmine Room, and it's just off the lobby."

"I see it," Shayne grunted. "How will I know you?"

"Oh, I'll know you, Mr. Shayne. I've seen your picture in the paper. You're rather large, with red hair, is that right?"

"You've got it. I'll see you in fifteen minutes."

Shayne hung up and grabbed an elevator that took him up to the suite on the fifth floor. When he went in, he saw that the view of the bay was indeed lovely, especially since it included Lucy, who was standing out on the balcony, letting the warm breezes ruffle her soft brown hair.

He came up behind her and slid his arms around her trim waist. She settled back against his rugged chest and said, "It's

beautiful, Michael. I'm glad you talked me into coming along with you."

"So am I, Angel," he murmured, planting a kiss behind her ear. "And I'd like nothing better than to enjoy it with you, but I've got to get this case out of the way first. I'm meeting with Francks in a few minutes."

Lucy turned in his arms and lifted her face. He brought his mouth down on hers and enjoyed the warmth of the moment. Then she broke the kiss and said, "I'm looking forward to this vacation... But Michael, the most important thing is that you help Randi Wilkerson. She must be terrified. I know I would be if I had been thrown into a foreign jail."

Shayne's mouth got a little grim. "You're right, Angel. Why don't you go down to the beach while I talk to Francks?"

"All right. I think a swim would refresh me."

She slipped out of his embrace, and he headed for the door with a tiny sigh of regret. That regret vanished, though, as he rode down in the elevator. It was time to go to work.

The Jasmine Room also struck him as familiar, since it was similar to many hotel bars in Miami with its dim lighting and muted background music. The music here was mariachi, though. As Shayne walked into the place, a man sitting at one of the small tables caught his eye. Shayne

stopped at the bar, ordered a Martell with ice water on the side, and then joined the man at the table.

"Stanley Francks?" Shayne asked.

The man nodded and said, "And you're Mike Shayne. It's a pleasure." He extended a thin, long-fingered hand for Shayne to shake.

Francks was in his fifties, lean and silvery-haired, with a deep, powerful voice. Shayne imagined that he would be pretty effective in a courtroom, but he didn't look like the type who could ferret out information from Mexican cops who wouldn't want to cooperate.

A waiter brought over Shayne's drink. He sipped the cognac and then said, "Tell me about Randi Wilkerson."

"A very nice young lady who doesn't always have the best judgment about her companions."

"This Enriquez . . . Was he her boyfriend?"

"So I gather. Here's the way it is, Mr. Shayne. Randi was down here on a vacation with two of her friends from college, a girl named Joan Hutchins and a boy named Todd Hall. They've been here for three weeks, and from what I've heard, they've been trying to take advantage of every moment. There are a lot of temptations here, Mr. Shayne, and evidently they were succumbing to most of them."

Shayne nodded in understanding and kept quiet, letting Francks proceed.

"Randi met Tony Enriquez not long after she got here, and she spent a great deal of time with him. He was a gambler, and I've heard that he also worked for a man named Saville."

"Who's Saville?" Shayne asked.

Francks sighed. "I'm afraid I haven't been able to find out much about him. I've only been here for a little over twelve hours myself. But he seems to be some sort of mysterious underworld figure here in Acapulco."

"What about the murder? How did Enriquez die?"

"It was last night. Randi and Joan and Todd had gone with Enriquez to a place called the Macando. It's a nightclub owned by someone who calls himself Ferrari. I've heard that Saville and Ferrari have some sort of feud going, so it seems strange to me that Enriquez would go there, since he worked for Saville. But they were there, there's no doubt about that. Plenty of witnesses saw Randi and Enriquez go into the garden behind the club. There was a shot a moment later."

Francks paused slightly, his face grim in the shadowy light. "When everyone ran outside, Randi was there, with Enriquez at her feet. He had been shot once, but that was enough. The police showed up a few minutes

later. When they searched the garden, they found the murder weapon in the bushes a few feet away. It had Randi's prints on it. They arrested her, and then they searched Joan and Todd. Both of them had drugs on them, so they were arrested, too. All three of them are still in jail. I haven't been able to get a bond hearing."

Shayne had been sipping his drink as Francks spoke, and now he downed the rest of it. He lit a cigarette, listened to the mariachi music for a moment, then said, "No wonder Wilkerson was worried. The cops have a damn good case. I suppose they're thinking that Randi shot him in a lover's quarrel."

"That's what they believe, yes. The man in charge, a Captain Obregon, is quite confident of a conviction."

"And Randi claims she didn't do it, right?"

"Of course she didn't do it. Would you like to talk to her?"

Shayne stood up. "Yeah. I'd say that was the next thing on the agenda."

Knowing what he was up against, Acapulco Bay didn't look nearly as good to Shayne now.

IV

STANLEY FRANCK'S GOT INTO the rented car with Shayne and gave him directions to the Acapulco jail and police station. The attorney cringed a bit as they

threaded their way through the busy streets, but Shayne got them there without any mishaps.

The grim building downtown was a vivid contrast to the luxuriousness of the hotels and the gaiety of the beaches. Shayne found a place to park a few blocks away, and he and Francks strolled back to the forbidding edifice.

Francks seemed to know where he was going inside the building. He led Shayne directly to an office on the first floor and knocked on the door. A voice inside told them to come in.

Francks opened the door, and Shayne almost gave an involuntary start of surprise when he saw the man sitting behind the desk. The man was whipcord thin, wore a spotless uniform, and had a narrow moustache over his thin-lipped mouth. The resemblance to Peter Painter, Miami Beach's chief and one of Shayne's longtime antagonists, was uncanny. This man was more swarthy than Painter, however, and when he stood up, Shayne saw that he was taller.

"Shayne, this is Captain Obregon," Francks said. "He's in charge of the investigation into Enriques' death."

"Enriques' murder," Obregon said evenly. "Who is this, *Senor* Francks?"

"I'm Mike Shayne," the big redhead said. "I'm here to . . . assist Mr. Francks in Randi Wilkerson's defense."

Obregon frowned. "You do not look like an attorney, *senor*."

"He's a private detective," Francks said, and Shayne wished that he hadn't.

Obregon's frown deepened. "An American private detective? You are aware, *Senor* Shayne, that we need not honor your credentials?"

"Maybe you should just consider me a friend of the Wilkerson family."

"You plan to conduct an investigation?"

"I just want to see that Randi gets a fair shake."

Obregon's frown went away and he pulled a thin black cigar from his shirt pocket. As he lit it, he said, "You need not worry on that matter, *Senor* Shayne. We have a very efficient police department here in Acapulco, very experienced in dealing with *turistas*. There will be no irregularities, if that is what concerns you."

Shayne lit a cigarette of his own. Obregon smiling didn't look any less sinister than Obregon frowning. Shayne said, "You won't mind if I talk to Randi and her friends, I suppose."

The frown came back. "That won't be necessary. I told you not to worry."

Stanley Francks put in, "I do have a right to see my clients, Captain, and since Mr. Shayne is an associate of sorts, I think he should see them, too."

Obregon's dark eyes went from

the lean attorney to the rangy, powerful detective, and Shayne could see plenty of hostility in them. But the Mexican official said only, "All right. Of course, I will not prevent you from seeing your clients. I will have you taken down to see them right now, if you wish."

"I wish," Shayne said shortly.

Obregon shot another glance at Shayne, then pressed a buzzer on his desk. The office door opened a moment later, and a stocky, sharp-eyed man in uniform came in. Obregon said, "Sergeant Mendez will take you to see the prisoners. Good day, *senors*."

Sergeant Mendez led them out after Obregon had spoken to him in Spanish. Shayne knew enough of the language to know that he was ordering Mendez to keep an eye on them.

Mendez walked a few paces in front of them, and Francks said quietly to Shayne, "I don't think Captain Obregon likes you."

"I'd say you're right," Shayne grunted. "He doesn't want anybody poking his nose into this case, does he?"

"Like you said, he's got a good, solid case. He doesn't want anyone interfering with it."

"Cops are the same all over."

Mendez opened a door that led into a stairway, and the three of them descended to the cell block in the basement. It wasn't quite as dingy as a lot of Mexican jails, but Shayne knew that being there

would be no picnic, either.

There was an interview room at the bottom of the stairs, and Shayne and Francks were ushered in. Mendez said in accented English, "I bring the girl. Five minutes, okay?"

"All right," Francks replied. To Shayne, he said, "That's about the best we can hope for right now."

They sat down in hard wooden chairs on one side of a scarred table, and a moment later, Randi Wilkerson was brought in. Her hands were free, but she was wearing a drab gray jail dress and looked like she wanted to be somewhere else. There was the look of a trapped animal in her eyes.

Despite the surroundings, she still managed to be quite attractive. Her figure was young and appealing, even in the prison garb, and her chestnut hair fell silkily to her shoulders. She took a seat on the other side of the table, said, "Hello, Mr. Francks," and looked at Shayne.

Francks performed the introductions. "This is Mike Shayne, Randi. Your father has hired him to get you out of this mess."

"Mr. Shayne," Randi nodded. "What are you going to do, bust me out of here? Did you bring some commandos with you?" There was a bitter set to her mouth.

"No commandos," Shayne

said. "Just me. I'm a private detective."

Randi looked at Francks. "I don't think that policeman, that Obregon, is going to like this."

"He doesn't," Shayne said. "And I don't give a damn what he likes." The room was probably bugged, and Shayne knew it. His lips quirked in wry amusement, but he restrained himself from a chuckle. "Why don't you tell me your story, Randi, and then I'll take it from there."

Randi glanced toward Francks, and the lawyer nodded encouragingly. She took a deep breath and said, "Well, to begin with, I didn't kill anybody. Do you believe me?"

Francks started to say, "Of course he beli — " but Shayne cut him off with, "Give me the facts and maybe I will. Then I can get started proving it."

"All right. I — I guess I never should have gotten involved with Tony, but he was a pretty charming guy most of the time. Joan tried to tell me that there was something not quite right about him, but I didn't care. The longer I knew him, the more stories I heard about him being mixed up with the head Mexican crook down here, but I guess I didn't care about that, either."

"The two of you spent a lot of time together?"

"As much as we could."

"Whose idea was it to go to that nightclub?"

"It was Tony's. We hadn't been there before, but he said we would like it. He — he told me about the garden outside." Her eyes fell to the table. "He said he wanted to see me in the garden in the moonlight."

"So you went into the garden after you'd been there a while?"

"Yes."

"Had you been quarreling?" Shayne asked.

"Absolutely not. Some of the people there thought they heard angry voices, but they weren't ours."

"What happened then?"

Randi's face paled slightly, and her hands, which had been clasped loosely on the table, clenched together. She said, "Tony started to say something to me, I don't know what, and all of a sudden there was this noise. It was the gun going off, of course, but I didn't know that at the time. All I knew was that it was loud. Tony grabbed at his chest and staggered away from me, and then he just kind of folded up, there on the path."

She paused, and Shayne kept quiet, letting her tell it at her own pace.

"Then . . . I heard something else, something rustling around in the bushes. I could see just the vague outline of a man. I guess I started to scream. Then the man in the bushes threw something at me. I caught it, to keep it from hitting me."

"The gun," Shayne said.

"Yes. The gun. When I saw what it was, and then looked at Tony, all crumpled up like that, I . . . I went a little crazy. I didn't think. I just threw the gun back toward where it came from, but by that time the man was gone and the people from inside the club were running out. One of them called the police."

Shayne tugged at his earlobe. "That explains how your prints got on the gun. Were there any other prints on it?"

Francks shook his head. "It was clean, except for Randi's prints."

"When the police got there, I tried to tell them what had happened," Randi went on. "They didn't seem too interested, though. That man Obregon was there, and he acted like he knew exactly what had happened. He kept talking about a crime of passion." A shudder ran through her lithe body. "They found the gun, and Obregon said that I was under arrest. I couldn't believe it. Joan and Todd spoke up for me, and so the police searched them, too. They said they found drugs on them. That's crazy, Mr. Shayne. I know they didn't have any drugs. We all knew about the laws down here, and we're not that stupid."

Mendez picked that moment to stick his head in the door and say, "That's all, *senors*. Time's up."

Randi stood up and turned to leave, then looked back at Shayne. She said, "I don't know if you can help me or not, Mr. Shayne, but try. Please try. I don't like it here."

A tiny muscle twitched in Shayne's cheek. He said, "I'll try."

As Randi went out, Shayne crooked a finger at Mendez. "We want to see the other two, also," he said.

Mendez came over to the table. "Senors," he said solemnly, "what good do you think you can do? The case is ironclad."

"Then any further investigation will only confirm what you already have, won't it?" Shayne asked.

Mendez looked at him intently for a moment. His eyes were not particularly hostile, and Shayne sensed that the man was intelligent. Finally, he shrugged and said, "The Captain told me to let you see the prisoners. I do what the Captain says."

Joan Hutchins was brought in first. She was the same age as Randi, attractive enough in a simple way, but Shayne knew she would be plain next to her spectacular friend. She also tended to babble slightly as she told them her version of what had happened on the night of the murder.

"So when this gunshot went off, well, it just naturally scared all of us, and Todd said it came from the garden, and I said oh, no, that's where Randi went, and

we all ran out there. Randi was standing there, see, and she looked like something awful had just happened, and then I looked past her and there was Tony on the ground, and there was enough light I could see he had *blood* all over his shirt! Well, I almost . . . Well, never mind what I almost did. Then the cops showed up and started rousting Randi, and Todd and I told them she wouldn't hurt anybody. So this head cop told his flunkies to search us, and they claimed they found grass and coke on us. No way, man! You'd have to be a complete flake to mess with that stuff down here."

Shayne exchanged glances with Francks, then said, "Thank you, Miss Hutchins. What you told us agrees with Randi's story, the part that coincides. I promise you, we'll do whatever we can to help you."

She stood up and said, "I sure hope so." Lowering her voice, she said, "I don't want any of these goons around here to know it, but I'm scared, Mr. Shayne. I put up a pretty good front, maybe, but I'd sure as hell rather be out of here, know what I mean?"

"Yes," Shayne nodded. "I know what you mean."

Todd Hall was next. He was a year or so older than either of the girls, with the fair hair and bronzed skin of someone who spent much of his time at the beach. He told them the same

things as Joan had, and it matched up with Randi's story, as far as it went. The problem was that no one could corroborate Randi's version of what had happened while she and Tony Enriques were alone in the garden.

Alone except for a killer in the shadows, if Randi was telling the truth.

Hall was adamant about the drug charges. "No way," he said, echoing Joan Hutchins. "If you ask me, those cops planted the stuff on us. I know I didn't have anything on me when I went into that garden."

"You and the girls are here on vacation, right?" Shayne asked. "Is there anything between you and either or both of them?"

Hall smiled. "Not really. We're just friends, man. Not that I would mind. Randi is really nice, let me tell you."

"You hadn't run into any trouble until this happened?"

"Not a bit. We've been havin' a great time." He shook his head. "Never expected to wind up in the slammer, though."

Shayne thanked him, and then Mendez reappeared and ushered the young man out. As Shayne and Francks left the building, the detective looked over his shoulder and saw Mendez watching them speculatively.

"There you have a couple of sharp operators," Shayne said to Francks.

"Obregon and Mendez?"

"Right. I wouldn't put much of anything past them. Including a frame-up."

They got into Shayne's rented car, and the detective pointed it back toward the hotel. Francks said, "What does it look like to you, Shayne? Do you think that Randi is being framed?"

Shayne jerked the wheel, maneuvering out of the way of a marauding taxi, and said, "The story she tells is kind of far-fetched, but plausible. Things could have happened that way. The catch is proving it. And the only way to prove it is to come up with the real killer."

Francks nodded. "That's what I thought."

"What about those other two kids? You know much about them?"

"Joan and Todd both come from good families, families with plenty of money. I've represented the parents in the past, and I've been retained by them in this matter, as well as by Mr. Wilkerson."

"Do you think they'd have drugs on them?"

Francks considered. "Like Joan said, they're not that stupid. Not that Todd hasn't been a little wild in the past, but all of his scrapes have been minor ones, the kind of thing that any youngster can get mixed up in. No, as far as I'm concerned, if they say they were clean, I believe them."

"Okay," Shayne nodded. "I appreciate the information and

assistance, Francks, but now it's time I really went to work. I'll drop you off at the hotel."

"What are you going to do?"

"Start poking. If there is a frame-up, whoever is responsible won't want me prying into it. Maybe he'll try to stop me."

"Mightn't that be dangerous?"

The smile that played briefly over Shayne's lips was grim. "It might be," was all he said.

V

SHAYNE GOT A FEW MORE details from Francks on the way back to the hotel, then accompanied him briefly into the lobby. He waved a hand in farewell as Francks headed for the elevators. Shayne picked up a courtesy phone and called his suite upstairs. There was no answer. Shayne gave a mental shrug. Lucy must still be out at the beach.

It was late afternoon by now, but Shayne had no time to enjoy the gentle breezes or the play of sunlight in the sky. He headed instead toward the Macando, the scene of Tony Enriques' murder. He wanted to get a look at it, and also possibly at its mysterious owner, the man called Ferrari. That name had to be a phony, and Shayne wondered what was in the man's background to make him want to conceal his identity.

Rush hour traffic made the streets even more of a madhouse than usual, and Shayne was glad

when he pulled off onto a quieter side street. This was a broad boulevard, and palm trees grew in profusion along some stretches.

The Macando looked like it might have been a private residence at one time, set well back off the street and surrounded by trees, hedges, and a well-kept lawn. It was a sprawling, two-story building, with the very common red tile roof. There was nothing common about the vehicles parked in a lot to one side, however. Shayne saw Porches, Mercedes, Continentals, and several other expensive breeds. Evidently the Macando catered to a select clientele.

He pulled in off the street, hoping that his poor rented sedan wouldn't feel too out of place. A parking attendant in a tight but resplendant uniform popped up, looked at the car with a touch of disdain, and said, "Have you a reservation, *senor*?"

Shayne decided to play the ignorant tourist. He got out of the car and said, "Reservation? I didn't know you had to have one. Listen, fella, I just stopped to have a drink."

"If you have no reservation, the doorman will not let you in, *senor*." The man shrugged his shoulders. "I am just trying to save you a little embarrassment."

Shayne had changed some of his travelers' checks into Mexican money at the hotel, and when he brought his hand out of his pocket,

the corner of one bill showed unobtrusively. "What would you say my chances were of convincing him?" he asked.

The attendant glanced furtively at the money, then shrugged again. "That I could not say. But if you wish to try, you are welcome to leave your car here."

Shayne grinned inwardly at the small victory. The bill changed hands deftly, and he strode rapidly toward the entrance of the club.

A broad man in a lightweight tuxedo was standing beside the door, and he saw Shayne coming. He changed his stance slightly. Shayne knew that he was getting ready to repel any invasion by a down-at-heels *turista* who couldn't even afford a Porsche.

But by the time Shayne reached the doorway, the corner of another bill was peeking out of his hand, and while the doorman didn't fall all over himself with respect, neither did he tell Shayne to beat it. He merely stood there, waiting for the next move.

"Like to get a drink," Shayne said. "I heard this was a nice place for a friendly drink."

The doorman arched an eyebrow. "You have a reservation?"

"Well, no, but I thought . . ."

"I am sorry, *senor*, but without a reservation, you cannot enter the club."

Shayne let the second bill in his hand slip into visibility. "Just a friendly drink, *amigo*."

"Well . . . " The doorman

shrugged. "It so happens, *senor*, that many of the evening's customers have not yet arrived. So I believe that there will be no problem in seating you at the bar."

They were going to let him in, but they were going to keep him in his place, Shayne reflected. Well, that was all right with him, as long as he got inside. Once he was in, he could play things by ear.

The man opened the heavy, ornately carved mahogany door and stepped aside to allow Shayne entrance into the dimness of the club. The money changed hands as Shayne stepped past the doorman.

Once inside, he had to pause for a moment to let his eyes adjust. Then, he moved toward the bar on the far side of the big main room. There was a dance floor on one side of the room, and the other was filled with plenty of tables. The atmosphere was quiet, subdued, expensive. Shayne slipped onto a red velvet barstool. The bartender came over to him after a moment.

"Martell," Shayne said.

The bartender murmured, "Certainly, sir," and moved away as quietly as he had come. Shayne looked back over his shoulder and studied the place briefly. It was a little more than half-full, he supposed, and all of the customers had drinks in front of them. Everyone was leisurely

dressed, but Shayne could almost smell the money in the room. He imagined that it would be pretty disconcerting to have a murder in the midst of all this splendor.

A moment later, the bartender returned with Shayne's drink. The redhead sampled it and then commented, "Excellent."

The corners of the bartender's mouth moved perhaps a sixteenth of an inch. "Of course, sir." He was being polite, but he didn't show any signs of friendliness. Shayne knew that the doorman could have passed him a high sign, indicating that the big brawny tourist could drink there but that the respect due the usual customer was not necessary.

The pose he was in was as good as any, Shayne supposed. Not bothering to keep his voice down, he asked the bartender, "Say, didn't I hear something about a murder here the other night?"

The man suddenly looked distinctly uncomfortable. He said, "I believe there was some slight difficulty, sir, but I know nothing about it."

Slam the door on *that* conversation.

Shayne tried again. "I thought sure I heard that a guy got shot here. Still, I don't blame you for not wanting to talk about it." He lowered his voice now. "Bet it's bad for business, isn't it? Still, if you played it up right, it might work out. Bring the tourists in to

look at the bloodstains, you know." He sipped his drink as the bartender began to look more and more aghast. "You know, play up the Latin lover angle, hot blood and all that stuff. The suckers will eat it up."

He dropped one eyelid in an exaggerated wink and then swiveled around on the stool. He had spotted the French doors that led out into the garden as soon as he had come in, but now he acted like he was noticing them for the first time. He said, "Hey, that's where it happened, out there, isn't it?" Still holding his drink, he stood up and walked quickly toward the doors.

He was close enough that no one could beat him to them. They were closed but not locked, he found when he turned the latch. He stepped outside as he heard the bartender's worried voice behind him, summoning someone else.

Shayne took a deep breath. He had a momentary respite, and he was going to take advantage of it. Gone was the crass *gringo* that he had pretended to be. His keen gray eyes swept the garden rapidly. From Randi's story and those of Joan and Todd, he was able to pick out the place where Tony Enriques had been shot. There was nothing to distinguish it now. What blood stains had been on the gravel pathway were gone now. The garden was a pretty place, full of trees and

shrubs and flowers, but it might also hold the key to the murder.

Still, a search would have to wait. He had barged in here hoping to stir up a commotion, and judging by the three men who came bursting out through the French doors, he had succeeded.

The burly doorman was in the lead, followed by two more men who looked like his cousins. None of them were as tall as Shayne, but they all carried a lot of heft. And none of them looked very happy.

The doorman spoke first, with none of the mock courtesy in his voice now. "This garden is closed. You will have to leave."

Shayne gestured with the hand that held the drink. "Isn't this the place where the guy got shot? Hell of a place for a killing."

"I said you must leave. Do not make us assist you."

Shayne grinned slyly. "If I didn't know better, I'd say you were threatening me."

One of the other men spat something in Spanish.

"Now that sounded like an insult," Shayne said. "I think I'd like to see the owner and tell him how you're treating a guest. That's *Senor Ferrari*, isn't it?"

The doorman snapped something else in Spanish and then took two quick steps toward Shayne. That brought him within reach.

Shayne flipped the brandy full in his face, then dropped the

glass. His left hand grabbed the man's coat and jerked him forward. His right hand stabbed out in a punch that had all of Shayne's nearly two hundred pounds behind it, despite the fact that it traveled only a foot.

The knobby fist landed with a satisfying crunch in the middle of the man's face. He would have reeled away if not for Shayne's grip on his coat.

The other two men were leaping forward now, glares on their faces, intent on dismantling Shayne. The redhead gave the doorman a shove, sending them sprawling into them. One of the men kept his feet, but the other one went to one knee before he caught his balance.

Shayne moved in on the one who was still standing. He ducked a punch and jabbed a left into the man's stomach. A hard right cross to the jaw sent him staggering.

The second man was back on his feet. A fist thudded into Shayne's side. Shayne blocked the next punch with a forearm, then hooked a shot of his own to the belly. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the doorman climbing to his feet, blood making a red smear of his face.

It was touch and go for a few minutes. Shayne kept them off balance enough that only one was attacking him at a time. If the fight had lasted long enough, they might have worn him down. But he didn't let it last.

He doubled one of them over with a blow to the solar plexus and then disposed of him with a clasped hand smash to the back of the neck. The second man went down and stayed down after a one-two-three combination that put him to sleep.

That left only the doorman, who lunged at Shayne with a roar. Shayne slipped to one side, grabbed the man's coat again, and used his own momentum to send him crashing into a thick-boled tree. The man rebounded, flopped to the turf, gave a groan and then lay still.

It took a second for Shayne to catch his breath. While he was doing it, he straightened his clothes and rubbed knuckles that were still sore from their collision with Alvin earlier in the day. Some of the customers inside the club were looking out through the doors intently, fascinated by the fracas in the garden with its attendant carnage.

And then Shayne heard the sound of two hands being clapped together delicately. A mellifluous voice floated down on him.

"Bravo. Bravo, indeed."

Shayne looked up. There was a balcony on the second floor overlooking the garden. A huge man stood there, a man who wore a white linen suit that was limp in the heat. His neatly trimmed beard was shot with gray, and his eyes, set in sockets of fat, sparkled as they looked down at Shayne.

"Quite a performance, sir," the man called down. "Very stimulating. Perhaps you'd care to come up to my office and have a drink with me. My name is Ferrari."

"I thought you'd never ask," Shayne said.

A MOMENT LATER, Shayne was ensconced in a comfortable chair in front of Ferrari's oversized desk. The desk was large enough that the man sitting behind it looked almost normal. Ferrari offered Shayne a cigar, which the redhead took, and then lit one of his own. Shayne caught a whiff of Ferrari's strong cologne, even over the cigar smoke. A red-jacketed waiter brought him a snifter of Martell, then handed Ferrari a tumbler of clear liquid.

"Mineral water," Ferrari explained, holding the glass up. "As you can see, I can no longer afford the calories of anything stronger."

Shayne sipped his drink and said, "So you're Ferrari. I've heard about you."

A broad grin made the folds of fat on Ferrari's cheeks overlap. "All of it good, I trust? Oh, yes, I'm sure it was." He chuckled. "And just who are you, sir?"

"Mike Shayne."

"I don't believe I've made your acquaintance before."

"You haven't. I'm from Miami, just got in today."

Ferrari quaffed the water. "Are you enjoying your stay in our little community?"

"It's been a laugh a minute. Especially the visit to the jail."

Ferrari looked concerned. "You mean you've had trouble with the law?"

"I was just visiting. Visiting a girl named Randi Wilkerson."

"Oh, yes! What an unfortunate circumstance. I hate to see the dear child in such trouble, especially when you consider that a lowlife such as Enriques probably had it coming."

Shayne blew a cloud of cigar smoke toward the ceiling. "I don't think she did it," he said sharply.

The calculating look in Ferrari's eyes had been there all along, but it became more visible now. "What do you mean? And just what are you, sir? I knew that you were more than a boorish American tourist when I saw how you dispatched my men down in the garden."

It was time to jump in with both of his big feet and hope that they didn't wind up in his mouth. "I told you, my name is Mike Shayne. I'm a private detective, and I've been hired by the Wilkerson girl's father to clear her name. The only way to do that is to find the real murderer."

Ferrari sat back and clasped his hands on his enormous belly. After a moment, he said, "That's a rather bold statement, Mr.

Shayne. And it doesn't explain why you came in here and disrupted my establishment."

"I wanted to take a look at the place," Shayne said carelessly, "and I wanted to meet you. I'd say I was pretty successful."

Ferrari leaned forward again and rested his pudgy palms on the desk. Slowly, he said, "Mr. Shayne, I do not appreciate this. I have already told the police everything I know, and I feel somehow that you are impugning my integrity. So, I will thank you to leave my club and not to return."

The jovial host had completely vanished, Shayne reflected.

"All right," Shayne said. "I think I've found out what I wanted to know, anyway." There, that sounded cryptic enough.

Ferrari pressed a button underneath his desk, and the doorman from downstairs appeared. There was a bandage over his nose.

"Escort Mr. Shayne out of the club," Ferrari said. The doorman got a very happy look on his face and started forward, but Ferrari raised a finger. "No more violence. Our customers have had enough entertainment without paying for it."

The man looked disappointed, but he stood back and let Shayne precede him from the office.

All the way down the stairs and through the club, he kept up a running stream of invective directed at Shayne's back in a low

voice. At the door, Shayne finally turned and grinned back at him.

"Take care of that nose, sunshine," the big detective said. "You don't want to scare too many little kids."

He left the doorman fuming there and strode to his car.

As he drove away from the Macando, he reflected on the afternoon's work. He had created some hostility on Ferrari's part, that was for sure, but that might not be bad. While there was no concrete reason yet to suspect the man of complicity in the murder of Enriques and the framing of Randi, there was no getting around the fact that he was in a good position to be involved. After all, the murder had happened at his club.

The sun had just about dropped down into Acapulco Bay by now, and Shayne headed for the Olympia Hotel. Lucy would be back from the beach by now, and they could have dinner at the penthouse restaurant in the hotel.

After that . . . Well, he wanted to get a line on this Saville, who was supposed to have been Tony Enriques' employer.

Those were the lines along which Shayne was thinking when he suddenly noted in the rear view mirror that a car was coming up on him rapidly. Speed, even foolhardy carelessness, were not unusual in these streets, but this was something out of the ordinary. This speed was tightly controlled

and bent on a specific purpose. Shayne had only a handful of seconds before the other car would be pacing him.

It swung out to move up beside him. Shayne glanced in that direction, caught a glimpse of swarthy faces in the twilight, and then he was standing on his brakes.

He heard the explosions as the other car rocketed past him. Bullets spanged off the hood of the rental job. Shayne fought the wheel of the bucketing car with one hand and slapped the other under his coat.

And there was no gun there for him to grab.

"Dammit!" Shayne grated. That was one thing he had forgotten, and now it might get him killed. He had meant to pick up a gun soon after arriving, since he had known better than to try to bring one into the country. But the errand had slipped his mind, and now there was nothing to answer his reflex.

The other car was braking now, too. They were going to try again. Running away from trouble was something that Shayne had never been good at, but now, with no way to defend himself, there was no other choice. He spun the wheel and sent the car into a side street.

Throwing caution to the winds, his pursuers cut across a palm-dotted lawn and fell in behind him again. Shayne heard more bullets

striking the body of the car, and he hoped desperately that one of them didn't find the fuel tank.

He took several more turns, some of them on two wheels, but he couldn't shake the men behind him. None of their slugs had done any real damage yet, but he knew that it was only a matter of time.

The car slithered through several busy intersections, drawing curses and blown horns from the offended motorists. The maneuver didn't slow up the pursuers, though. Another cross street loomed up in front of Shayne, and he thought he caught a glimpse of a possible way out. Instead of slowing momentarily and picking a path through the traffic, he floored the accelerator and aimed for a place where there was no hole.

The timing was perfect.

The front corner of Shayne's car caught the rear corner of one of the crossing cars, causing little damage, but the collision brought both cars to a screeching halt in the middle of the intersection.

The other vehicle was an Acapulco police car.

Shayne rolled out of the seat and came up in a crouch beside the fender. The car that had been chasing him came to a rapid stop a block away, made a fast, well-executed turn, and sped away, just as Shayne had hoped they would. He had been banking on the assumption that they wouldn't

want to get mixed up with the cops.

A torrent of near-hysterical Spanish rolled over him, and he turned, grinning wryly, to cope with a couple of shocked Acapulco cops. They didn't know what to make of this big redheaded *norteamericano* who had come out of nowhere to ram them.

It appeared that neither of them spoke English, and Shayne tried to explain in his less than fluent Spanish. He pointed out the fleeing car that had attacked him, but they paid little attention. The thing that was of paramount importance to them was the dented fender of their car.

Shayne was surprised when one of them suddenly pulled his revolver, leveled it at him, and gestured for him to spread-eagle against the car. He complied grudgingly while the second cop got on the radio and did some fast talking.

A few minutes went by, and Shayne was getting a little cramped in his present position, when another car roared up. This one was unmarked, but Shayne immediately recognized the man who got out.

"Well, *Senor* Shayne," Captain Obregon purred, "it looks like you have run into some trouble."

"Glad to see you, Captain," Shayne said, hoping that statement sounded more sincere than he felt. "I've been trying to explain to your men here that some-

body was trying to kill me."

"Is that why you were driving like a madman through our peaceful streets, endangering the lives of innocent citizens? I am sorry, *Senor* Shayne, but you must come with me. We will discuss the charges against you."

"Charges?" Shayne exploded. "What charges?"

"Reckless Driving and Disturbing the Peace will be a good place to begin," Obregon said smoothly. He snapped a command to the uniformed cops.

They moved in, spinning Shayne around efficiently and slapping handcuffs onto his wrists. The cuffs pinched, and their use of them had been none too gentle. Shayne had to force his anger back. Losing his head and fighting back now would only get him into more trouble, slowing down his investigation that much more. As soon as they got to the station, he would call Stanley Francks and see about getting sprung.

The cops put him into the back seat of Obregon's car, and one of them rode with him while Obregon drove. The officer had his gun out and never took his eyes off Shayne. Evidently, they considered him quite a desperado.

It didn't take long to reach the police station. Obregon parked behind it, and he led Shayne and the other officer inside. They didn't go to Obregon's office this time, but rather, directly to the

cell block in the basement.

"Am I officially under arrest?" Shayne asked Obregon's back as they walked down the hall.

"You are in my custody," Obregon answered without turning around.

"Don't I get a phone call?"

Obregon said something in Spanish, and the cop behind Shayne grunted. Without warning, his fist smashed into the small of Shayne's back.

Shayne staggered and almost fell. He hadn't been expecting the blow and hadn't been braced for it. A curse sprang to his lips, and he looked daggers at Obregon's ramrod-stiff back.

They followed the twisting hall back into a corner of the building. Shayne didn't like the quiet that had descended. Obregon unlocked and opened a heavy metal door, then stood back as Shayne was shoved inside. Obregon came in and shut the door behind him with a clang. Utter silence fell. The barren white room was sound-proofed.

Obregon smiled wolfishly. "Now, Shayne, you will find out what we really think of arrogant *gringos* who try to interfere with our processes of law."

"I'm only trying to save an innocent girl," Shayne rumbled.

"Be quiet, Shayne. What you have to say no longer interests me."

Suddenly, Obregon's hand whipped around and cracked

across Shayne's face. The detective shook his head, and a snarl forced its way out of his throat.

"Why don't you take these cuffs off me?" Shayne growled. "Then we could really make it interesting?"

"I am no fool to be taken in by such a taunt, Shayne. No, we will do this my way." Obregon began to slip his belt off, and now Shayne noticed the little metal studs on it.

He was in for a beating, and there was nothing he could do to stop it, trapped as he was in the very police station itself. But there was no way he was going to just stand there and take it.

Before Obregon could move, Shayne lowered his head and launched himself forward. He drove into Obregon, butting him in the stomach and slamming him into the wall. Shayne spun, bringing an elbow into play as he straightened. The point of it slipped Obregon in the head, and the belt fell to the floor.

Even with his hands cuffed behind him, Shayne was making a fight of it, and he might have held his own for longer if the other officer hadn't stepped in. But just as Shayne was drawing back his leg for a well-aimed kick at Obregon's groin, the other cop leaped at him. He had reversed the revolver in his hand, and he brought the butt of it down hard on the back of Shayne's

head. Shayne let out a groan and slumped against the wall, multi-colored pinwheels spinning in front of his eyes. Before he knew what was happening, he had slid down to his knees.

Obregon loomed up in front of him, and then a booted foot slammed into his chest, knocking him flat on his back.

The belt was back in Obregon's hand now, and as he stood over Shayne, fiery curses poured from his lips. His arm rose and fell, and Shayne felt the bite of the belt as it raked across his unprotected face.

It became a little monotonous after the first few minutes, the steady rise and fall of Obregon's arm, the shattering agony of the belt lashing his face and body.

Shayne never knew when he passed out.

But he knew when he woke up. He was still flat on his back, but now he was on what felt like a cot, and instead of the bright, sterile room where Obregon had beaten him, he was in a shadowy cell. Someone was bending over him.

Shayne hurt clear through, especially his head and shoulders, which had taken the brunt of the beatings. A groan rose from within him, and he tried to sit up.

"Take it easy, *senor*," the figure standing over him said. "You should rest a few minutes. Here, drink this."

He felt some cool, soothing liquid trickle down his throat.

It was wine, and the crisp bite of it a moment later seemed to give him some strength. He recognized the other man in the cell as Sergeant Mendez.

Shayne managed to sit up this time, and after a moment of earth-shaking nausea, he felt better. It had been a while since he had taken a beating this bad, but he knew that his strong constitution would rebound from it.

"You never should have gotten the Captain angry, *Senor Shayne*," Mendez went on. "He can be a very violent man."

"Tell me about it," Shayne muttered.

"He might have killed you, if Chavez hadn't stopped him. You are really a lucky *hombre*, just to be alive."

A thought penetrated the haze of pain in Shayne's head. "What time is it?"

"A little after seven o'clock."

Shayne shook his head gingerly. Lucy would be wondering where the hell he was. Maybe Mendez would let him call her. The Sergeant seemed to be quite a bit more amiable now that Obregon wasn't around.

He didn't have to worry about that, though. Mendez gave him another swallow of wine from the flask and then said, "If I was you, I'd just keep going once I got out of here."

"What do you mean, out of here?"

"You're sprung, *Senor Shayne*.

Somebody with some pull got the charges against you dropped. You're free to go, soon as you get ready."

Shayne got his feet on the floor and stood up shakily. "I'm ready. I could use a little more of that wine, though."

Mendez gave him the flask, and Shayne braced himself again. Then Mendez opened the cell door. He led the way upstairs.

Shayne still had all of his valuables, which was a bit of a surprise to him. Mendez escorted him to the front door of the police station. The cops and assorted civilians in the station gave him leery glances. Shayne could tell by the way his face felt that it was pretty battered. He tested his nose gently with his fingers. It wasn't broken.

"You sure you can make it back to your hotel?" Mendez asked.

"I think so. Is my car impounded?"

"I am afraid so. Would you like for me to call you a taxi?"

"I'll do it," Shayne grimaced. "You'd better run along, Mendez. If Obregon sees you treating me decently, he's liable to send you back to pounding a beat."

Mendez's face became fierce. "The Captain is my superior, but he does not evoke fear in my heart, *senor*. You would do well to remember that."

"No offense meant," Shayne said, then grinned. "Well, maybe a little bit. Anyway, thanks for

helping me."

"It would be a good idea for you to remain in Acapulco, at least for the time being."

"Try getting me out."

Of course, someone *had* been trying to get him out, permanently. That someone could be Obregon, or Ferrari, or somebody else entirely. Like the mysterious Saville.

Shayne limped out to the sidewalk and was looking for a cab when the door of a car parked at the curb opened. A man in a black suit and a cap stepped out and beckoned to Shayne.

Another trap? Not likely, right in front of the police station. Still, Shayne was careful as he walked over to the car. The man in the cap opened the back door.

A voice came from inside. "Mr. Shayne?"

"That's right."

Shayne could see a well-manicured man's hand, palm up in a gesture of welcome. "We will take you back to your hotel, Mr. Shayne. I think you and I have much to discuss."

Shayne bent and looked into the back seat. The man sitting there was the type that would look at home anywhere he went. He wore simple but expensive clothes, and a large gold band gleamed on his finger. His face was smooth and unlined, but there was silver in his dark hair. Shayne took a guess. "You're the one

who got me out of jail."

The man smiled, exposing perfect white teeth. "Juan Luis Saville, at your service."

VII

SHAYNE SETTLED BACK against the soft back seat of the car as the driver pulled away from the curb. Saville continued to merely sit and smile at him.

After a moment, Shayne said, "I suppose I should thank you for getting me out of there. I'm curious about a couple of things, though."

"Such as?"

"Such as how did you know who I am and that I was in jail?"

Saville's smile widened. "I am sure you have heard many things about me, Mr. Shayne. If one of them was that I have many and varied sources of information, then it was true. I make it my business to hear things."

"Then you probably know why I came to Acapulco."

Saville inclined his head. "But of course. You came to help the beautiful Miss Wilkerson and to discover the real killer of my friend Tony."

"I've heard that Enriques worked for you."

"I like to help my friends out with jobs when I can. Tony occasionally worked for me."

"I've also heard that you run the rackets in this town," Shayne said bluntly.

Saville threw his head back and laughed. "Such impudence! That is one thing I have noticed about you already, Mr. Shayne. You say what you think."

"Right now I'm thinking I need a hot bath and some aspirin."

Saville nodded, a look of concern on his face now. "And it wouldn't hurt for a doctor to look at that worst cut on your head. It may need stitches. When we get back to the hotel, I'll have my own doctor look at it."

"That's not necessary."

"I insist." Saville picked up a mobile phone that was set into the back of the front seat and began speaking Spanish. When he hung up, he said to Shayne, "It is all arranged. My physician will meet us at your suite."

There was no point in arguing, Shayne saw. He sat back to rest, taking advantage of the momentary respite. The driver made his way directly to the Olympia, and Saville rode up in the elevator with Shayne. The clerk in the lobby had looked like he wanted to protest as the battered and bloody Shayne entered, but the presence of Saville kept him quiet.

When Shayne keyed the door of the suite open and walked in,

Lucy started up from where she was sitting on one of the luxurious sofas. She started to say, "Michael, where were you? I was worried —" She broke off with a soft cry as he came into the light.

He put a hand on her shoulder and said gently, "Take it easy, Angel. It's not as bad as it looks. I just got beat up a little bit."

"A little bit? Michael, they nearly killed you!"

He shook his head. "Nope. I'll be as good as new in a little while." He remembered Saville standing there. "Excuse me. This is *Senor Saville*, Lucy. *Senor Saville*, my friend, Lucy Hamilton."

"I am charmed to meet you, Miss Hamilton," Saville said elegantly.

Shayne quirked a bushy eyebrow as he watched Lucy's response. Charm was exactly what Saville was doing. Lucy was a little flustered, and Shayne made a mental bet with himself that Saville would kiss her hand before the evening was over.

There was a knock on the door before things could go any further, though, and Shayne admitted a portly, middleaged man who turned out to be the doctor that Saville had summoned. He cast a professional eye over Shayne's injuries, then spoke to Saville in rapid Spanish.

Saville turned to Shayne and said, "He wants to close up that

cut and clean the others, Mr. Shayne. I will leave him to his work and wait for you down in the bar."

"Wait for me? I don't understand."

"It's simple. You and Miss Hamilton are going to be my guests for dinner at my villa." Saville held up a hand to forestall any protest. "Now, I insist. You are trying to find the murderer of one of my friends. That means you are not only my guest, but my honored guest."

Well, Shayne reflected, he had wanted to get a line on Saville, and here was the man in person. His every instinct told him that Saville's suave, sleek exterior was covering something up, but the best way to find out what might just be to play along. Shayne exchanged a glance with Lucy, then said, "We'll be glad to. I want to get cleaned up first, though."

"Take your time." Saville showed his teeth to them again and then bowed his way out of the room.

The doctor didn't say anything, but he was good at what he did. He took three stitches in Shayne's forehead, closing the cut, and then covered it with a small bandage. The other wounds took only some disinfectant. Shayne refused the injection that the doctor offered. It wouldn't do to trust Saville, or his doctor, completely.

When the doctor was gone,

Shayne applied his own headache remedy — a tumbler of cognac and a tubful of water so hot that he could barely stand to lower himself into it. But once he was in it, it seemed to burn the aches and pains away.

While he soaked, he filled Lucy in through the open bathroom door on everything that had happened since he left her that afternoon. The day had been so full that it was hard to believe it had been less than twelve hours since Alvin had stalked into his office in Miami, followed closely by chaos.

All in all, Shayne felt at least ninety percent better as he and Lucy rode down in the elevator. He was wearing a clean white shirt and lightweight slacks and jacket, and he was in a better position now to appreciate the balminess of the night.

Saville greeted them at the entrance to the bar and escorted them out to his car.

The route to his villa was a winding road that led up into the hills that surrounded and overlooked the bay. Lucy sat between Shayne and Saville in the back seat, and the car was wide enough that there was no crowding.

As the driver piloted the car around the sweeping turns, Saville asked, "What has your investigation turned up so far, Mr. Shayne? That is if you don't mind talking business."

"I don't mind at all," Shayne said. "I haven't turned up any

new evidence, but the things that have happened have confirmed my suspicion that Randi Wilkerson is being framed. If I wasn't making somebody uneasy, I wouldn't have been shot at."

Saville nodded. "A reasonable conclusion. Are there any questions you would like to ask me?"

"You didn't answer the one I asked earlier about the rackets."

"Mr. Shayne." There was a chiding note in Saville's voice. "I am not a racketeer, not one of your American gangsters. I am merely an expeditor, a man who likes to do things for his friends."

Lucy shot a glance at Shayne out of the corner of her eye, a reproachful glance, as if it was bad form to cast aspersions on their host.

"What can you tell me about a man called Ferrari, then?" Shayne asked. "I met him a little earlier today."

Saville looked as if he would have cursed or spat, had it not been for Lucy's presence. "There is a bad one," he said. "There is a racketeer. I have heard that there is gambling in his club, and rumors say that he is considering moving into other areas." Saville sighed. "He is most certainly not a friend of mine."

Shayne thought he knew what Saville meant. Ferrari was thinking about trying to cut himself in on some of Saville's operations. Such a move wouldn't sit well with Saville, and there was

the potential for a gang war here, Shayne was sure of that.

"If Tony Enriques worked for you, why was he at Ferrari's club?"

There was a slight tightening of the muscles around Saville's mouth. "Tony could go where he pleased," he said. "But your question is one that I have also asked myself."

They arrived at the villa a few minutes later, turning in through heavy wrought iron gates that opened at an electronic command. The house itself was set far back off the road, behind several acres of lawn and trees. Shayne thought he saw more than one shadowy figure strolling through the grounds. Armed guards, he was sure of that.

The mansion had an air of antiquity about it, and Shayne had to admit that it was beautiful. There was a courtyard in the center, open to the stars above but completely surrounded by the building. Saville gave them a quick tour of the place, and Lucy was impressed by the furnishings and the artwork on the walls.

Saville then led them out onto a broad terrace at the rear of the house. The hillside fell away from it sharply, and less than twenty yards away, it dropped off in a cliff. Shayne could hear the surf pounding on the rocks below.

Servants clad in fine livery served the meal on a table covered

with a dazzling white spread. Lucy looked a little askance at some of the unfamiliar dishes. but Shayne dug in with gusto once he discovered that his appetite had survived the rigors of the day. He washed the food down with excellent dark beer, and Saville looked pleased that his guests were enjoying themselves.

Shayne had hesitated slightly at first, though, until he saw that Saville was eating and drinking the same things they were. He thought he caught a glimpse of wry amusement in the Mexican's eyes. Both men knew pretty well where they stood.

When the meal was over, and Shayne and Saville were relaxing with cigars and brandy, Saville pointed off into the night and said, "You see those lights across that little valley, *amigo*? That is the villa of the man you asked me about, Ferrari. I think that neither he nor I care for the proximity of our homes, but neither one of us is willing to move."

Shayne exhaled a cloud of smoke and said, "You mentioned that Ferrari was mixed up in certain things. What things would that be?"

Saville shrugged. "You ask me a question that I cannot answer with any degree of certainty. This is a country with lucrative opportunities for a dishonest man. Smuggling is one of the most tempting of those opportunities."

"Drugs?"

"Of course. The government has tried to put a stop to it, but there is too much border and not enough men. Not to mention the coastlines. But other things can be smuggled, too. Precious metals, for example. There are other kinds of gold in Mexico besides the infamous Acapulco Gold. And there are other treasures, also, great works of art dating back thousands of years. With the constant flow of tourists back and forth, it is impossible for the authorities to catch everything." Saville smiled thinly. "Of course, there are more mundane things that can turn a quick profit. It is not unheard of for shipments of gasoline to be hijacked from Pemex."

The conversation continued for several more minutes, Shayne and Saville kicking around various ramifications of Mexican crime. Shayne knew that he was talking to an expert.

He also knew that this whole evening could be a farce, a charade on Saville's part to find out just how much about the Enriques case that Shayne knew.

Saville drained the last of his brandy and asked, "Is there anything else I can do to be of service to you, my friend?"

"There is one thing," Shayne said slowly. "I didn't bring a gun into the country, but considering everything that's happened, I know I'd feel more comfortable if I had one."

"Naturally," Saville smiled. He beckoned to a servant, spoke to him briefly, and then the man went into the house. He returned a moment later, carrying a shoulder holster with a pistol in it. Saville took it from him, stood up, and handed it to Shayne.

"Will this one be satisfactory?"

It was a 9mm Luger, a gun with which Shayne had enough experience to make it useful. He tested the balance of it, checked the clip, and then took his jacket off long enough to shrug into the shoulder outfit. He snugged the gun down in the holster, replaced his jacket, and gave Saville a taut smile. "It's fine," he said.

Saville gave him two boxes of ammunition, then said, "I would not recommend that you let the police know about it, however."

"I wasn't planning on it."

After a few minutes, Shayne and Lucy said their goodbyes and thanked Saville for his hospitality. He insisted that his driver would return them to their hotel, and then Shayne won his bet with himself. Saville took Lucy's hand, bent over it, and kissed it gently. She looked completely overwhelmed by his gesture.

They were in the car, heading back down out of the hills, when Lucy noted the grin creasing Shayne's rugged face. The smile made the sore places ache a little bit, but he couldn't restrain it.

Slowly, she asked, "Michael, what are you smirking about?"

"Nothing, Angel, nothing at all."

"I don't believe you for a second. I think you're jealous because *Senor Saville* kissed my hand, and you're trying to cover it up."

Shayne knew that there might be some truth in her statement. He was about to say so when Lucy added, "And besides, you're not the only one who can put on an act when you have to, Michael. I'd say that Saville was pretty flattered by my reactions, wouldn't you?"

"You're right, Angel," he agreed thoughtfully.

The rest of the trip back to the hotel was uneventful. Shayne said, "*Gracias*," to the driver when they got out, and the man replied, "*De nada*."

They rode the elevator up to their suite. Most of Shayne's bones and muscles were aching again, and he was thinking about taking a hot shower this time as he unlocked the door and opened it, reaching to his right as he stepped inside. His finger hit the light switch and flicked it up.

Lucy was right behind him, and she let out a scream. Shayne's foot slipped in the blood on the floor. He grabbed the door jamb to keep his balance.

He looked down at the bullet-riddled body of Todd Hall and said, "Damn! Damn it to hell!"

SHAYNE MOVED ON into the room and pulled Lucy in after him. They stepped carefully around Hall's body. Shayne shut the door and locked it.

Lucy was pale, but she looked like she had regained some measure of control. Shayne said to her, "Listen, somebody will have heard that scream. We've got to call the cops, but before we do, we've got to know where we stand."

"I — I understand, Michael."

He bent over Hall's body, his eyes searching for any telling detail. The young man had been shot several times in the body, and he had bled some, although not as much as the wounds would seem to justify. Shayne reached out and touched Hall's face lightly, then grunted. "Cool," he said. "It's been a little while. Probably right after we left with Saville."

Lucy frowned. "Saville would have known that the suite was empty . . ."

"That's right, Angel. Somebody planned for Hall to be found here, because he was killed somewhere else. There were no marks around the lock so whoever got it open and dumped Hall here knew what he was doing."

Shayne leaned a little closer to the body. There was something about it that bothered him, a faint, unidentifiable odor. He shook his head, but no answers popped loose.

"All right, Angel," he said, "we'll call the cops, and we'll tell them exactly what happened. No point in trying to keep Saville out of it. Enough people saw us leaving with him that someone would tell the cops about it."

Shayne picked up the phone and got the desk clerk in the lobby downstairs. When Shayne told him to call the police, that there was a dead man in their suite, he had to hold the phone away from his ear as an excited yammer erupted from it. Shayne grimaced and hung up. "That should get some action."

While they were waiting, Shayne quickly went through Hall's pockets, being careful not to leave any signs of the search. It turned up exactly nothing, though, not even any personal effects. Hall was wearing the same outfit he had on when Shayne talked to him earlier in the day in the jail. Staring grimly down at the body, Shayne pulled on his earlobe. It looked like Hall had either escaped from the jail or been killed there. If he had escaped, where would he go? And why would the person he went to kill him?

Lucy sat down, her eyes carefully avoiding the dead man, while Shayne paced back and forth across the room. It seemed like something in this case was constantly breaking, but he didn't know much more now than he had upon arriving in Acapulco.

He knew that he trusted neither Ferrari or Saville. If one of them had killed Tony Enriques and framed Randi, it was possible that Obregon was in league with the killer, acting to make sure that Randi was convicted so that the real murderer would be in the clear.

There were still other questions to be answered. Assuming Randi's innocence, had Enriques been killed because he was a threat to someone, or merely to frame the American girl? Did all three of the young people know something they shouldn't? That would account for the trumped-up drug charges against Joan Hutchins and Todd Hall.

Shayne's mind sifted through everything he knew about the case, but he couldn't form a pattern with the information, not one that hung together and answered all the questions. In frustration, he picked up an English-language newspaper from Mexico City that was lying on one of the tables in the suite, scanning it to take his mind off the case for a few minutes. It was a technique that had worked for him occasionally, this complete clearing of the mind so that it could concentrate on something else. This way, the elusive pattern might just spring full-blown out of his subconscious.

All he got for his efforts this time, though, were a few minutes of boredom as he read about a

U.S. envoy's visit to Mexico City, a series of museum robberies, a strike by garbage collectors, and the latest bullfight results.

And then he heard footsteps coming rapidly down the hall. They stopped in front of the door to the suite, and there came an officious pounding. Shayne stepped over Hall's body again and opened the door. His face twisted in a grimace when he saw who stood there.

"*Senor Shayne*," Captain Obregon said smoothly, "I think this is going to be a bit more serious than the previous charges."

Shayne stepped back to let the officers enter. Obregon was followed closely by Sergeant Mendez and two more uniformed policemen. They formed a loose circle around the body, and Obregon shook his head. "What a fool," he said. "*Senor Hall* never should have left our hospitality."

"Are you saying he escaped?" Shayne snapped.

"That is right," Obregon answered. "Several hours ago, as he and several other prisoners were being returned to their cells after their evening meal. He attacked a guard, took his gun away from him, and shot his way out of the jail. Luckily, none of my men were killed."

"And Hall wasn't wounded?"

"Unfortunately, no. Unfortunately for you, *Senor*, Shayne. Why did you kill him?"

Lucy sprang up from her chair. "Michael didn't kill him! she exclaimed. "He was like that when we found him!"

"Please, *senorita*, I am in charge here." Obregon's lips twisted in a sneer. "There will be no dropping of the charges this time, Shayne. Not with murder."

Deep trenches had appeared in Shayne's cheeks. "You can't be serious," he said. "What reason would I have to kill Hall? Besides, I didn't bring a gun into the country. You can check that."

Even as he said it, he was acutely conscious of the Luger under his arm. If he was searched, that wouldn't look good. From what he could tell from the wounds, the gun that had killed Hall had been a different caliber, but that wouldn't matter to Obregon. The man obviously had it in for him, and a simple matter of evidence wouldn't deter him from railroading the big detective.

Mendez was speaking urgently to Obregon in Spanish, and Shayne thought that he was trying to talk him out of whatever he had in mind. But Obregon was not going to be swayed. He poked a finger at Shayne and snapped a command to the other two officers. They came forward menacingly. One pulled handcuffs from his belt, and the other reached for his gun.

Several thoughts raced through Shayne's mind in that split-second. Whether Obregon was

really in on the frame-up or just hated Shayne for some unknown reason, there was a good chance that he had more in mind than a simple arrest. If he was taken into custody, Shayne knew that he would be in deadly danger. More than one prisoner had been killed while trying to "escape." Even if Obregon didn't try to pull something like that, he might pull another beating, and this time he might not stop while there was still breath in the body of his victim.

And there was no way Shayne could do Randi Wilkerson any good if he was locked up in jail, facing a murder charge himself.

All this flashed through his mind, and then he was moving. He leaped backwards, hand darting under his coat and coming out with the Luger. Lucy gasped, "Michael!"

Obregon cursed and reached for his own gun. He was the closest and most immediate threat, so Shayne lashed out with the pistol and raked it along Obregon's temple. The Captain's gun went flying, and he slumped to the floor.

None of the other three had their guns out yet, and Shayne covered them. "Hold it!" he growled. "I don't want to shoot anybody, so don't make me."

"*Senor Shayne*, don't do this!" Mendez pleaded. "I know you do not trust us, but you will be treated fairly. I promise this!"

"I might believe you, Mendez, but Obregon there wants my head, and you know it. I've still got a killer to find, and I can't do it in jail. The only thing I can do now to clear my name is find Hall's killer. I've got a hunch that when I do, it'll clear up the Enriques case, too."

Obregon gave a groan and stirred on the floor. Shayne moved away from him and sidled toward the door. Lucy said, "Michael, take me with you."

He shook his head solemnly. "Can't do it, Angel. Not with the cops after me, as well as whoever tried to kill me earlier." His voice became more savage. "Listen, Mendez, I'm holding you responsible for Miss Hamilton's safety. You know she doesn't have anything to do with this. So you keep her out of Obregon's hands."

Mendez looked sorrowful. "I think you are overestimating my capabilities, *Senor* Shayne. The wisest thing for you to do is hand that gun over to me. Nothing will happen to you beyond what the law requires."

"Sorry, Sergeant." Shayne reached behind him and found the doorknob.

Obregon sat up, shook his head, and saw what was happening. After a livid curse, he struggled to his feet. "You won't get away with this, Shayne!" he promised viciously. "You'll be dead before morning!"

"I've got a better chance this way than the other," Shayne declared, swinging the door open. "Adios, Captain."

With a last glance at Lucy, he stepped into the hall and then slammed the door behind him. The elevator at the end of the hall had just arrived, and Shayne sprinted for it.

He barreled past the elevator's departing passengers and ducked inside it as Obregon and his men came spilling into the hall from the suite. He snapped the Luger up and sent two shots screaming over their heads to slow them down. The doors of the elevator slid shut.

The ride down to the lobby seemed to take hours instead of minutes, but when the doors slid open again, Shayne knew that he was still ahead of his pursuers. The lobby was relatively quiet, but it started to buzz when Shayne ran through it, the gun clutched openly in his hand.

He slipped it back into its holster as he pounded out onto the sidewalk. There was excited yelling behind him, but he spotted a cab cruising along down the block. As soon as it slowed down to his hail, he was beside it, jerking the door open and flinging himself into the back seat. He snapped, "Just drive!" and if the driver didn't understand English, he might have understood the urgency in Shayne's voice.

The big redhead settled back

in the seat and then glanced over his shoulder. In the lights around the entrance of the hotel, he saw Obregon come running out. His lead had been big enough, though, that he didn't think the Captain had seen him enter the cab. At least he hoped not.

Taking a deep breath, Shayne reached inside his coat and found the little notebook that he nearly always carried. Earlier in the day, he had jotted down the address of the condominium where Randi, Joan and Todd Hall had been staying. Stanley Francks had provided the information, and now Shayne was going to put it to use.

The apartments of the young people were one place he had not yet visited, and perhaps he could find a new lead there.

One thing was certain — he had to come up with something soon.

His time and luck had just about run out.

IX

IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG for the cab to reach the condominiums. According to Francks, the three young Americans had shared a two bedroom suite on the second floor. Shayne paid the driver and then paused for a moment on the sidewalk in front of the complex.

He had seen no signs of pursuit, so he figured that he had a little time in which to operate. Once Obregon thought about it, he

might send men to keep an eye on this place, but Shayne was certain it would be unwatched now.

There were lights in many of the apartments, and traffic cruised by on the street. Lighting a cigarette, Shayne strolled into the interior courtyard as if he had every right in the world to be there.

Concern for Lucy kept threatening to crowd into his mind, but he forced himself to concentrate on the issue at hand. He would just have to trust Mendez to see that she came to no harm. Considering the circumstances, she probably would have been in more danger had he gone peacefully with the cops and been locked up.

A metal stairway led to the upper floors, and Shayne ascended it quickly. It only took a moment's search to locate the door he was looking for. It was locked, and since he didn't have the ring of master keys he sometimes carried, he had to make do with a credit card and his pocket knife. There were shadows to hide what he was doing, but he was still relieved when the lock finally yielded and clicked open.

He stepped inside and swung the door shut behind him in one motion. The interior of the apartment was pitch black at first, but after a few seconds, Shayne's eyes adjusted to the dim light filtering in from outside

around the drawn curtains. He stood utterly still, listening intently. There was no sound in the apartment, other than the beating of his heart as it pumped blood and adrenalin through his veins.

When he was convinced that he was alone in the apartment, Shayne went slowly across the room, feeling his way along in the shadows. He found a door into another room and then pulled his cigarette lighter from his pocket. Flicking it on, he hoped that enough fuel was left in it to illuminate his search.

Fifteen minutes went by quickly as Shayne looked for something, anything, to shed some light on this case. He kept coming up empty, though.

It didn't take long to discover which room was which. The closet in the larger bedroom was filled with women's clothes. Shayne rummaged through them, then looked in all the drawers of the chest and dresser. There was nothing to incriminate anyone, and certainly no drugs.

Moving on to Todd Hall's bedroom, he followed the same procedure, going through all the clothes in the closet, then checking the drawers. Still zero. Shayne gave a long, grim sigh.

Feeling a little foolish, Shayne knelt and looked under the bed. *No Bogeymen*, he thought wryly. And then he spotted something far back in the corner.

The glow from his lighter was too dim for him to tell what it was. Stretching out on the floor, he reached a long arm under the bed and felt his blunt fingers close around the object. He pulled it out and sat up, examining it in the light.

Hardly bigger than his thumbnail, it was a chip of rock, rugged and irregular. Shayne frowned. There was a slightly musty odor about it. One side was rougher than the other and looked like it had been recently broken off. The other side was smooth and polished, as if it had been worn down by centuries of handling.

Something tugged at Shayne's brain, but he couldn't quite grasp it. He got up and pocketed the piece of stone. It might come in handy later, though he couldn't yet see why he felt that way.

He hadn't searched the bathroom yet, so he headed there next. Again, there was nothing out of place or unusual. He was standing there staring at a bottle of Todd Hall's aftershave when it hit him.

He had smelled a strange scent on Hall's body, a scent he realized now had been like aftershave. And yet the young man had not been shaving in jail. The smell must have come from someone else. *Like the killer?*

Shayne uncapped the bottle of aftershave in the medicine cabinet and sniffed it. He couldn't be

absolutely sure, but he would have laid odds that it was different from the odor that had lingered on Hall.

A grimace stretched Shayne's lips in the semblance of a grin. He had met someone today who wore a noticeable scent. This didn't clear up everything, not by any means, but it was a start in the right direction.

Before he could think about it anymore, though, he heard a floorboard creak in the other room. Someone had followed him into the apartment, and now here he was, all but trapped in this little bathroom.

He snapped the lighter off with one hand and grabbed for the Luger with the other. The door into the room was partially closed, but Shayne went into a dive and slammed it open with his shoulder. It wouldn't do any good to wait for the intruder to come to him. Surprise was his best chance.

He hit the floor rolling. Someone yelled, and a gun blasted almost in his ear. Shayne lashed out with a foot and felt it connect with something soft. There was an explosive grunt of pain.

Shayne came up in a crouch. A questing hand got lucky and came down on a shoulder. Shayne spun the man around and slashed through the shadows at where the head should be.

It was. There was a sharp cry as the gun hit home, and the man

went limp in Shayne's grip.

The second one hit him then, slamming into him from behind and knocking him to his knees. Shayne's left shoulder rammed into the wall, sending pain shooting through him. He drove his right elbow backwards but didn't connect with anything.

The shot already fired would bring the police, so he didn't have to be leery about using his own gun. There was nothing to shoot at but shadows, though.

An arm snaked around his throat and tightened. Shayne threw himself to one side, hitting another wall but dislodging the attacker. Snarling, Shayne spun around, and his knobby fist found a target, guided by instinct and luck. He could hear the man staggering backwards.

The wild melee in the darkness had Shayne turned around. He didn't know which way the door was, and he had dropped his lighter, which would have only made a target anyway. He could hear the other man scrambling around, probably getting back to his feet.

There was a dim glow to Shayne's left. He headed for it. The attacker must have heard his steps and used them for a guide. Shayne had just reached the light and found that it was a window when the man hit him from behind.

Shayne grunted and tried to turn around. The man was pum-

melting him unmercifully, though. Shayne blocked some of the punches and threw one of his own that connected. There was a curse in Spanish, the first word that had been spoken during the fight, and then Shayne caught a glimpse of movement. A stray beam of moonlight reflected off the gun that the other man was bringing to bear. There was no other choice now but for Shayne to fire.

The two guns sounded like one as they went off together. Shayne felt a fiery finger rake along his side, and the impact drove him backward. He heard a high, keening cry from the other man, and the sill of the window banged into the back of his knees. Shayne tried to regain his balance as he hit the window pane, but the glass wasn't strong enough. With a shattering crash, he fell right through it.

There was no time to maneuver his landing. One leg hit in a shrub that cushioned the impact, but the other found the unyielding concrete of a sidewalk. Darts of agony stabbed Shayne's right leg. He sprawled out full-length on the sidewalk, the Luger clattering away from him momentarily. He snatched it back up and then lunged to his feet. The pain in his leg made him gasp and wince.

He could hear sirens howling somewhere nearby. There was a constant chatter of Spanish from the other occupants of the condominiums as they called to each

other, wanting to know what was going on.

Shayne looked up. He could see the broken window on the second floor above him, but at least there was no one in it shooting at him. While he was intensely curious about who had attacked him, he wasn't going to hang around to find out.

The bullet crease in his side was uncomfortable, but most of the pain centered in his ankle. By favoring his right leg considerably, he was able to walk slowly. He went in the opposite direction from the sirens, hoping to come across a taxi before he had to go very far. Some of the pain went away as he walked, working the ankle, and his pace picked up slightly.

He had gone nearly four blocks when he spotted a cruising cab and whistled for it. It felt wonderful to sit down in its back seat and take his weight off the leg. He said to the driver, "The Macando Club."

The driver glanced back over his shoulder and took in Shayne's disheveled condition. He looked for a moment like he wanted to tell his fare that he would never be admitted to the club in such a disreputable state, then he shrugged his shoulders. What the big *turista* chose to do was none of his business.

Shayne propped his leg up and began to massage the ankle. There was some slight swelling

already, but if he had been able to get off it and stay off it, with some hot water added to the bargain, the sprain would be mostly gone by morning. The trouble was, he couldn't stay off it, and the only hot water around was what he was into up to his neck.

Still, by the time the cab reached the Macando, Shayne felt like he could navigate fairly well, although a footrace was out of the question. He motioned for the driver to go on past the club, then tapped his shoulder to halt him a block later.

Shayne handed enough pesos over the seat to satisfy the driver's curiosity as well as pay the fare. Grimacing, he slipped out of the cab and walked into the shadows as quickly as he could.

He had seen when they passed the club that it was doing a good business, with many cars in the parking lot and every light in the place on to judge by appearances. He wasn't planning on going in through the front door this time, though.

The neighborhood was unfamiliar, but he had no trouble in circling around behind the property. Within minutes, Shayne found himself staring at a brick wall that marked the rear boundary of the place. Making sure the Luger was secure, he leaped as best he could and grabbed for the top of the wall.

Bits of broken glass sliced into his fingers. He let go and dropped

back down, being careful to land on his left leg. The jar still sent a shock through him.

He whipped his coat off and rapidly sliced it in two with his knife. Wrapping a piece around each hand, he made the jump again. The glass still jabbed him slightly, but the coat afforded his hands enough protection for him to get a good grip. He swung his left leg up and hooked it over, managing to keep the sole of his shoe on the glass. It was a relatively simple matter then to pull himself up into a crouch on top of the wall and study the layout inside.

He could see the garden where Tony Enriques had been killed. It stretched nearly to this wall. Directly below him was a narrow strip of grass. He dropped to it as gently and quietly as he could.

There were people strolling in the garden, but Shayne didn't think any of them had seen him. He hobbled toward the house, slipping from shadow to shadow stealthily.

The French doors he had used that afternoon were out. He would have to find another entrance. Ferrari's office was his destination.

There was a trellis on the wall, but he knew it would never stand the weight of his rangy body. The design of the building itself, though, provided something that might prove to be a way in. There was a regular pattern in the bricks,

in which a brick protruded several inches every couple of feet in an alternating fashion. Shayne studied the wall for several long seconds, then shook his head in resignation. He was no damn swashbuckler, that was for sure, but there was no other way in that he could see. He had to give it a try.

He waited for nearly five minutes, hoping that some of the people in the garden would go back inside. Just when he was about to give it a try anyway, the band started to play inside, and the garden emptied in seconds.

It was a stroke of good luck, and he was going to take advantage of it. In a split-second, he was out of the shadow that had given him concealment and had a solid handhold on one of the bricks. He swung his good foot up, letting his hands bear his weight for a moment, then his toe found purchase.

Shayne was very glad he only had to make it to the second floor. The climb was a hard one, since he was practically one-legged, but he managed. Five minutes later, breathing hard, he was level with the balcony outside Ferrari's office. All he had to do was move to the side a few feet, and he would be there. He could already see that the doors into the office were open.

Gritting his teeth against pain and exhaustion, Shayne moved

that few feet and then lunged, coming to rest on all fours on the balcony. He was ready to move in a hurry, but it didn't look like it would be necessary. The interior of the office was dark.

Shayne got to his feet, paused for a second to catch his breath, and then slipped into the office. He could see a line of light under the door coming from the hall outside. He wondered if he dared turn on the light in here. He needed to search the place if he was going to find any evidence of Ferrari's complicity in this whole thing.

He had just been through too much that day, that was all there was to it. Or else he would have noticed the fragrance in the air earlier. He didn't notice it until it was too late, though, and then the light snapped on, nearly blinding him.

"You *are* becoming an annoyance, Mr. Shayne," Ferrari said. "I was really distressed when one of my men told me you were climbing up the wall like some sort of human fly."

The huge man was sitting behind his desk, a small automatic almost lost in his fat hand. Shayne's hand started toward the luger, but Ferrari snapped, "Don't do it, sir! I would hate to cause an uproar in my own club by shooting you, but I will most certainly do it if I have to."

Shayne moved his hand back slowly and said, "You wouldn't

have to worry about the cops, would you? Not with Obregon in your pocket."

Ferrari smiled. "You are a fool if you think I'm going to deny anything, Mr. Shayne. I am no longer in a position where I have to. I admit that the good Captain works for me. What else have you figured out?"

"That Todd Hall came here tonight after he escaped from jail. That you killed him and had him dumped in my room. It just took me a while to remember where I had smelled the odor he had on him. It was your cologne, Ferrari, the stuff you must drench yourself in."

"It was a distasteful business, Mr. Shayne. Young Hall was going for my throat when I shot him, and he fell against me rather heavily. I'm not surprised that some of my fragrance rubbed off on him." Ferrari grimaced. "I know some of his blood got on me."

Shayne was unable to stop the epithet that forced itself from him.

"Here now!" Ferrari said. "No need to be insulting. Tell me, Shayne, what else do you know, or think you know?"

"I think Todd Hall was working for you," Shayne said, "and that you double-crossed him. He never thought he'd wind up in jail, and he came here tonight to try to make you help him."

"We certainly put an end to that notion. Now, Shayne, very

carefully, use your left hand and take your gun out. Drop it on the floor."

Shayne did as Ferrari said, looking for some opportunity to make a play. The club owner was too alert, though; there just wasn't an opening.

"I'll wager that you don't know what's really behind all of it, do you?" Ferrari went on. "Isn't that puzzling you?"

Ferrari was planning to kill him, Shayne knew. He wouldn't be admitting everything freely unless he planned to dispose of his listener. So there was nothing to lose, no reason not to play the sudden hunch that had struck him.

"Of course I know what it's about," Shayne said. "Let me put my hand in my pocket and I'll show you."

Ferrari frowned. That wasn't the answer he had expected. He said, "Slowly, Shayne, slowly."

Very carefully, Shayne reached inside his pocket and pulled out the chip of stone he had found under Hall's bed. He held it up where Ferrari could see it and said, "This is what it's all about. This, and all the rest of the loot, wherever you've got it hidden. Hall won't get to be one of your couriers after all, will he? You'd better have plenty of others, so you can get rid of the stuff. From what I read in the paper, the federal authorities are pretty hot to find whoever knocked over those museums and made off with

all those pre-Columbian treasures."

Most of it was guesswork, derived from the hastily-scanned newspaper article, but the pallor that washed over Ferrari's face told Shayne that he had hit the mark. Ferrari said, "How — you couldn't have known . . ."

"I do, though," Shayne said, pressing what small advantage he had. He had to keep Ferrari thrown for a loop. "And it makes sense that Tony Enriques found out about it, too, through his friendship with those three kids. He told you he'd spill the whole thing to the cops unless you cut him in on it. You wouldn't want to share the goodies with anybody else, let alone a stooge of Saville's, so when he went into the garden with Randi Wilkerson, you took advantage of the situation and had him killed. The frame fit Randi like a glove, and your tame cop Obregon pulled her two friends in, too, on phony drug charges. Enriques threw a monkey wrench into your plans, but you came out of it all right, even if you did have to sacrifice one of the couriers you had recruited." Shayne put a sneer on his face. "You really thought your trail was covered, didn't you?"

Ferrari wasn't pale now; he was livid with anger. Shayne shook the chip of stone at him and said, "That's what did it, a simple chip off one of the statuettes, probably." Ferrari stared at it.

And Shayne threw it right in his face.

He was right behind it, launching himself at the startled Ferrari. Normally, a fat man wouldn't have a chance. But the battering Shayne had endured took its toll. Ferrari avoided the lunge and brought the gun around with all the power of his huge body behind it. The barrel thudded into Shayne's temple, and the big redhead sprawled out on the desk. He struggled to get to his feet as Ferrari yelled for help. By the time Shayne was upright again, the door of the office had banged open and men were pouring in. Hands grabbed him and fists smashed against his face and body. He would have fallen if not for the press of bodies around him.

When it finally closed in, the blackness was almost welcome.

HE WOKE UP TO SOFT HANDS stroking his face and a worried voice saying, "Wake up, Michael, please wake up."

Forcing his eyes open, he saw Lucy bending over him. At first, there was no memory of how he had lost consciousness, and he stretched sore lips into a grin. "Heaven, right, Angel?"

Another voice intruded. "Not heaven, you stupid *gringo*. Hell. That is where you are going."

It was Obregon. Shayne made himself sit up on the floor, saw the

cruel policeman, and saw the gross figure of Ferrari behind Obregon. They were all in an unfamiliar room, a room done in dark, rich panelling, with a wooden floor polished to a mirror finish. From the furnishings, Shayne guessed that it was a den.

"We are at my villa, Mr. Shayne." Ferrari had recovered some of his smoothness. "Unfortunately, circumstances prevent me from being a gracious host to you and your lady."

"Are you all right?" Shayne asked Lucy. "I told Mendez to look out for you."

"I'm fine, Michael —"

Obregon interrupted. "Mendez . . . hah! He does what I tell him to, Shayne. He may not like it, but he does it. He has the *cojones* of a snake, that one!"

Lucy was kneeling beside Shayne. She asked anxiously, "What about you, Michael? Are you all right?"

Shayne rubbed the back of his neck. "Just fine, Angel, except for a hell of a headache, a sprained ankle, and various other bruises and contusions, most of them caused by these two comedians here."

Neither Obregon or Ferrari rose to the taunt. Ferrari said, "No doubt you sprained the ankle when you escaped from the men I had watching Hall's apartment. I tried to discourage you, Shayne, and so did the Captain here, so you have only yourself to blame for

what will happen to you and Miss Hamilton."

Lucy was pale but controlled. She said, "Michael, does he mean —"

"Yes, Angel, he does."

Ferrari turned to Obregon and said, "Take care of it, Captain. My men will assist you. I believe I will retire for the night. It's been a long day."

Obregon turned toward Shayne and Lucy and smiled as Ferrari waddled toward the door. With great relish, he said, "On your feet, Shayne. We will go outside. No sense in staining this floor."

Lucy gave Shayne a helping hand. He climbed to his feet, contempt for Obregon showing on his face. Their only chance was to get the man rattled. He said, "This is just like a Mexican. Too big a coward to face an enemy on equal terms. All that *mano a mano* stuff is bull."

Obregon shook his head and laughed. "No good, Shayne. It won't work." Keeping his revolver leveled on Shayne, he opened some heavy drapes to reveal a sliding glass door. Outside, Shayne could see a sloping lawn that led down to the cliffs. That would be a nice convenient place to dispose of the bodies.

Ferrari paused at the other door and looked back. "Good night, my friends," he said softly.

And the shooting started outside.

The rattling roll of gunfire

sounded like a full-scale war. Ferrari and Obregon both jerked their heads around, eyes wide in surprise. "The villa must be under attack!" Ferrari gasped.

Shayne wasn't going to wait for a better opportunity. There wouldn't be one. He dove toward Obregon, knocking the gun aside and smashing into the corrupt officer. Both men crashed into the glass door, and for the second time that night, the sound of shattering glass filled Shayne's ears. This time Obregon broke his fall, though.

The gun had gone spinning out of Obregon's hands. Shayne yelled to Lucy, "Grab it!" and then his hands were full. Obregon was flailing wildly at him, and some of the blows were connecting. Shayne warded them off and got his knees on Obregon's chest. Remembering all he had gone through at this man's hands, Shayne put everything he had into the blow he struck.

His fist crashed into Obregon's jaw, driving the man's head down against the floor. It bounced once, and then Obregon was slack underneath Shayne.

The redhead got to his feet and looked around. Ferrari had disappeared into the hall, but Lucy still stood there, clutching Obregon's gun. She said, "Michael, what's going on?"

He took the gun from her. "It sounds like the cavalry. All the shooting's coming from the front

of the house. Maybe we'd better go out the back."

Taking her hand, he led her over the sprawled body of Obregon and through the wreckage of the door. Blood from a cut trickled down the side of his face, but he ignored it.

Shayne could see flashes of gunfire all around the house now. He half-dragged Lucy into a thick stand of bushes. As they crouched there in the darkness, he said in a low voice, "You stay right here. Don't move, and don't answer anybody except me. These people could be kind of trigger-happy."

She grabbed at his arm before he could slip away. "Michael," she said, "you be sure to come back."

"I will, Angel." He grinned. "We haven't even started our vacation yet."

He hurried away, hoping that Lucy would be concealed well enough there. The firing was dying down now. One side or the other seemed to be on the verge of winning the firefight.

As he drew near the house again, he could hear someone shouting in Spanish. It sounded like an order to cease firing. It must have been, because things got quiet. After the racket of the battle, the silence had an eerie ring to it.

A flashlight beam suddenly lanced out of the night and pinned him in its lights. Shayne spun,

throwing the gun up, ready to start blasting and sell his life as dearly as possible . . .

"No! Hold your fire, Shayne!"

It was a familiar voice, and Shayne's finger, already white on the trigger, stayed its motion at the last second. A man in black seemed to come out of the very night itself, into the light.

"It is over, Shayne," Saville said. "Those dogs of Ferrari's will trouble you no more."

There was no hostility on Saville's face. Now that Shayne looked around, he could see other men in black ringing them, all armed with automatic weapons. They could have cut him to ribbons if they had wanted to.

"You had a man following me," Shayne guessed.

Saville nodded. "I knew something unusual was happening, and I thought you would be the man to find out what. I was right."

"You know what it's about?"

"My men found the cache in Ferrari's basement. From their description, I know what it is."

Shayne glanced around at the men surrounding him. "I suppose you can take it for yourself now."

"*Amigo!* No matter what you have heard about me, I am a Mexican. I will not steal a part of my heritage from my people. No, when the police arrive, you can show them where the stolen treasures are."

Shayne's gray eyes locked with Saville's dark ones in the dim

light from the house. The big detective asked, "And what about you?"

Saville laughed. "We will be long gone, my friend. Tell the police what you will; it will not matter. My only regret is that we did not find Ferrari."

A long second passed, and then Shayne transferred the gun to his left hand. He extended his right, and Saville took it. Then the dark man nodded. He stepped back into the shadows, and he and his men seemed to disappear, with only an "*Adios*" floating back to show that they had ever been there.

That, and the bodies of Ferrari's men scattered through the house and grounds.

Shayne heard a whole convoy of sirens climbing into the hills. He went slowly back to the place where he had left Lucy and called out, "It's okay, Angel. You can come out."

There was no answer.

Shayne plunged into the bushes, thrusting them to one side, sweeping his eyes over the ground desperately.

Lucy was gone.

There was a screech of tires as cars turned in at the drive. The flashing lights on their domes cast flickering illumination on the scene. And as Shayne heard doors slam and men begin to yell questions, he also heard a wheezing voice say, "Stand very still, Shayne."

Ferrari came out of the shadows, one hand over Lucy's mouth, the other clasp ing her upper arm. Behind them, another gun in his hand, was Obregon.

"We can still slip away," Ferrari said quickly. "It is most distressing to leave behind such a treasure, but our lives are of greater value. Miss Hamilton will go with us as a hostage. You, Mr. Shayne, are of no use to us. But we shall enjoy watching you die!"

"Shut up!" Obregon grated. "Get out of the way, you fat fool, so I can shoot him!"

Shayne tried to sight past Lucy and Ferrari, but there just wasn't enough room. He got ready to dive to one side.

Before a shot could be fired, a portable searchlight stabbed through the darkness and lit up the whole scene. Someone yelled, "Everyone be still!"

But Obregon spun toward the light and aimed at it, squeezing off one shot. He never got a chance to fire another.

The chatter of automatic fire ripped the night. Obregon went backwards, arms flailing, red blossoms blooming all over his body. He fell to the turf, little more than a bundle of shredded clothes.

Something soft hit Shayne with a gasp. He grabbed Lucy and thrust her to the ground. Ferrari had shoved her at him and was running away, along the edge of the slope. Shayne rapped, "Stay

down!" to Lucy. He saw Sergeant Mendez hurrying toward them, a rifle in his hands.

Shayne took off after Ferrari. The fat man was no runner, but he had a lead, and Shayne had a sprained ankle. He also hadn't stopped moving for over twelve hours, and fatigue deadened every muscle in his body.

It made for a good race.

But after a few hundred feet, Shayne had narrowed the gap. He was about to make a flying tackle when Ferrari's feet went out from under him. The man went rolling down the slope with a yell, trying desperately to regain his balance before he went over the cliff. His hands scrabbled at the dirt in panic.

And then Shayne caught one of his wrists, digging in and hanging on, stopping Ferrari with his feet dangling in midair over a hundred foot drop to the surf-washed, jagged rocks.

"Thank God!" Ferrari cried. "Pull me up, Shayne! Pull me up!"

Shayne dug his heels in deeper and looked back. Mendez was pounding up, and he could see Lucy not far behind, along with more police. He turned back to Ferrari and said in a calm, level voice. "I'm going to let you go."

"No!"

"Then tell it all. How you had Enriques killed and how you killed Todd Hall yourself. How you got

that museum loot, and how you planned to get it out of the country. And about how Obregon was a crooked cop. Tell it all, Ferrari!"

"Whatever you say!" the man wailed. "It's all true!"

"You tell it, I said!"

Haltingly, Ferrari gasped the story out, plain enough for Mendez and the other cops to hear. Shayne exchanged a long look with Mendez, and the Sergeant nodded.

Shayne heaved. Several of the cops leaned forward to help, and they pulled Ferrari back onto solid ground. Shayne stood up and turned around, and then Lucy was in his arms and he was murmuring, "All over, it's all over now . . ."

Twenty minutes later, Shayne was saying into a phone in the villa, "That's right, Mr. Wilkerson, Randi will be out by morning, and so will her friend Joan. It's all cleared up. They had nothing to do with the smuggling. Hall was the only one mixed up with

Ferrari."

T.J. Wilkerson's voice, complete with long distance static, came over the wire. "By God, Shayne, when I sent you down there, I never expected things to pop this fast! Damn, when you get back here I might just have a little ol' bonus for you."

"Not a year's supply of your burgers, I hope."

"What's that? Aw, hell, no, I'm talkin' about something really good. Say, I got an idea. I run into problems all the time in my line of work, and I got me a hunch you'd make a hell of a troubleshooter. What would you say to being on permanent retainer to ol' T.J.?"

Shayne glanced over at Lucy, waiting for him and for that vacation to begin. After this case, it would have to be a good one! Shayne said into the phone, "I think we've got a bad connection here, Mr. Wilkerson."

He hung up, limped over, and took Lucy's hand . . .

Mike Shayne returns next month in

ENCORE FOR DEATH

by Brett Halliday

DON'T MISS IT!

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Without Pity

by LEWIS SHINER

He'd built up a good, solid case, but unless Private Detective Dan Sloane could produce the real killer, the State would put away the wrong person!

HIS EYES WERE OPEN and his head bobbed around at an impossible angle. He was sitting in about forty feet of water, stone

dead, one arm pinned between the rocks. As best I could tell, he had been dead when he landed there. The mud and ooze around him

was as serene and smooth as he was.

The cop who was assisting me swam over and made a palms up gesture. I shrugged back at him and began to work the body loose. The corpse had only one leg, and as I worked I wondered what he had been doing in the lake. I got the arm free and kicked toward the quicksilver surface above me. The body turned bloated and heavy when I broke water with it, and it took three of us to load it into the police launch.

I dried off and got a coke out of the cooler. It was getting to be another Texas scorcher, and the sunlight bouncing off the surface of the lake felt like it had needles in it. My mouth was dry from breathing canned air and the carbonation burned like fire. Winslow, from the sheriff's office, sat down next to me. "I appreciate this, Dan," he said.

"No problem." Sam Winslow and I had grown up together about twenty miles outside Austin in a little town called Coupland. We'd fought a lot as kids, and there were still plenty of differences in our politics and educations. But being on the police and fire rescue squad had brought me closer to him again, and I was glad of it. A private detective needs all the friends he can get. "What do you make of it?" I asked him.

"Accidental drowning, looks like." I raised an eyebrow but didn't say anything. "He's got a

bump on the head that could have come off a rock. We'll see what the coroner says."

"Any idea who he is?"

Winslow shook his head. He'd gained weight in his face recently, and his jowls vibrated with the gesture. "No one legged men on the missing persons list. Looks like it could be a war wound, maybe. Worth a try sending the prints to Washington."

Sailboats like scraps of paper blew across the lake. Winslow turned to the driver of the boat. "Let's get the meat to the freezer."

A burst of static and a chattering voice made me jump. Winslow went to answer the call, and I leaned over the rail and looked at the water. My reflection came back at me — stocky, tan, with a head of short sandy hair that had receded half way up my skull. I looked my age, and it was getting to where that was no bargain any more. A few gulls darted over me, complaining in harsh, strident voices. "You're a long way from the ocean," I said, looking up at them. "You better take what you can get."

Winslow came back, not bothering to hide his excitement. "You can forget nature boy over there," he said, nodding to the corpse. "We got real news on our hands. I hope you didn't have anything planned for the rest of the afternoon."

Winslow was my ride back to Austin, which meant I was along for the duration of whatever emergency had come up. "You know I don't. C'mon, spill it."

"They just found Jason King," Winslow said, and his eyes shifted to a big house above us, over the lake. "He's been murdered."

THE CURRENT FAD was for sex scandals, so Austin had found Jason King. His story was the usual thing — a not too competent secretary who claimed she was kept on for immoral reasons. King was a County Commissioner, which in Texas is a big legislative job, so the papers had been getting all the mileage they could out of it for the last week. Now it looked like it had caught up with King in a very big way.

Ed McCarthy had been waiting for us in the squad car while the boat was out. His baby blue uniform was drenched with sweat, and his dark glasses glinted at me evilly. "How was the swim, gumshoe?" he said.

"Not bad, flatfoot," I answered. Ed grinned and I grinned and we all got in the car.

Winslow leaned back and said, "That's the trouble with you guys. You watch too much TV."

The car took off with a huge billow of dust and we shot down the gravel roads with the siren cranking. Winslow had gone quiet, and I knew he was thinking about the case. Jason King was a

hot item, and Winslow was just starting to realize how carefully he was going to have to watch his step. One mistake and he was a scapegoat, both for the sheriff and the people at the capitol. The smile slid quietly off his face and the burned-in wrinkles came back.

McCarthy pulled up in front of a big two story house. Ahead of us the road ended in a white painted barricade, then fell off a cliff into the lake. There were three or four cars already at the house, including a blue and white Austin police car, and an ambulance, its multi-colored lights still turning silently. We walked up the flagstones to the house, and it seemed to lean out over us. The upper story sat on a row of colonial type columns, and the contrast they made with the ranch styling of the rest of the house set my teeth on edge.

The ambulance attendants passed us with a stretcher, and Winslow lifted the sheet for a quick look. The bullet had come through the back of the head, at close range. The face was almost completely gone. Winslow dropped the sheet and nodded, and they carried the body away.

The sound of voices led us upstairs. Inside, the house seemed to be trying to live down its nouveau-riche exterior. The carpets were thick, running to subdued colors and patterns. The upstairs hall was hardwood paneled, with brass light fixtures and framed lithographs on the walls. I recognized a

Matisse and a Picasso.

When we got to the door of the study everyone looked up for a minute, then went back to popping flashbulbs, dusting prints and taking measurements. Chalk marks near the door showed where King had fallen, and a rusty stain disfigured the carpet. In the back-ground I could see an English style library arrangement with leather bound books and heavy furniture.

A middle aged cop in uniform who I knew by sight but not by name made his way over to us. He pointed out a heavy set Chicano in white ducks who was wandering around with a look of profound misery. "That's the houseboy," he said. "Name's Chico. He found the body. Yesterday was his day off, so he can't pin down a specific time for the killing."

"How did he find it?" Winslow asked.

"Came up to see if King wanted dinner, and saw him. He's only been here about an hour."

"Did you find the gun?" I asked.

He showed us a Colt long barrel .38, and the spot near the body where it had been found. "House-boy positively identifies it as King's own gun."

I stepped over a small grey man with a magnifying glass and looked at King's desk. In the center of it was a big loose leaf scrapbook, the kind that ties together with a silken cord. It was open to an article on the Korean

War. I flipped through it casually, recognizing photographs of King, his wife, and various others at various ages. Beside it was a desk pad, and the words "green Chevy" and a phone number were written on it, surrounded by the short crisp line of a compulsive doodler. I memorized the number, just to have something to do.

On the corner of the desk, as if it had been put aside, was a steel construction handbook. I looked through it, too, but failed to make any sense of it. A few pages were marked, but it would have taken an expert to tell me what that meant. Under it was a mimeo sheet with the heading "County Bond Proposal." The only other object was a cigarette lighter which I was afraid to touch because of fingerprints. It was standing on end, and from behind the desk I could make out an insignia of some sort, a lightning bolt and the word "Thundermugs."

I looked up to see Winslow at the door. "They've got Mrs. King downstairs," he said to me. "I'll be with her for a while." I nodded and went to the window.

Filmy curtains fluttered in the wind, and it seemed cooler to be up above the lake. I was only in the way in the study, and I had no professional interest in the case. So I fought my way back to the door and went downstairs and into the back yard.

The lawn gave out at a six foot hurricane fence that surrounded

the house. I walked down to the gate and let myself out onto the top of the cliff.

I had started sweating as soon as I stepped outside, and the water looked cool and inviting below me. It looked to be about a fifty foot drop, almost perfectly straight down to the water. I followed the line of the cliff for a while, and found a path that wound its way down to a shelf just above the water. It was covered with a coarse river gravel that was too uncomfortable to sit on, so I crouched for a while and watched the sailboats. They were a symbol to me of the kind of people, like the Kings, who had everything I never would have — money, prestige, a sense of time. But the sense of time was a lie, and even people like Jason King could die, suddenly, in a brief flash of mortality. I climbed back up the path.

"IT'S OPEN AND SHUT," Winslow confided to me on the way back to town. "Marion King has a motive, what with all this mistress business, and she can't account for herself at the time of the murder."

"Why wasn't she staying at the house last night?" I asked.

"She was at her sister's. She says her sister was sick. I say like hell. Here's how it was."

"Marion King quarrels with her husband over the mistress and moves out. She thinks it over, decides she wants a divorce, say.

Then she tells her sister she's going to a movie. She doesn't want her sister to know she's even seeing her husband again. She goes to the house, tells him she's leaving him for good. He pulls a gun, threatens her. That's the last straw, he says, I'd be ruined. They struggle over the gun, it goes off."

"King was shot through the back of the head," I said.

"Okay, *she* pulls the gun and threatens *him*. He tries to walk out on her, and bang, it goes off. Maybe she didn't mean for it to."

The road heaved and dipped over countless hills between the lake and the outskirts of the city. The swaying car and white heat were numbing me. I considered asking Winslow what he made of the scrapbook and lighter, but changed my mind. It wasn't my case, and there was no point in stirring things up.

They dropped me at my house and I waved as they pulled away. Two bills sat waiting for me in the mailbox and a jug of milk had gone sour overnight. I cooked a couple of hamburgers and took a shower, then went outside with a beer. I sat in the front lawn and drank the beer and pulled Johnson grass. Johnson grass is a vicious, predatory plant that can take over a lawn in a matter of weeks. All its leaves come out of a central root system, and to pull it up you have to track down all the runners and separate leaves and pull them back to the center. Pulling John-

son grass is just the job for an out of work detective. I stayed at it until it got too dark to see what I was doing.

MY EMPLOYMENT STATUS changed at ten o'clock the next morning. I heard a tapping at the door and dropped my book into the center drawer of my desk. Before I could say anything, a husky blond kid with short hair and bangs came in. He introduced himself as Jeff King, the dead man's son.

I offered him a chair, noticing a gold cross at his throat and a strong smell of aftershave at the same moment. I guessed him to be about eighteen.

"I assume you know what happened to my mother," he said. I nodded, and he went on. "She didn't kill him, Mr. Sloane. If you knew her, you would know she couldn't have done it." He had a clear, ringing voice, with a taste of the deep south — Alabama or Georgia — in his accent. He was calm, direct, almost, painfully sincere.

"I know the man who's handling the investigation," I said. "He's a friend, and he's an honest man. You can trust him to see that justice is done."

"The Lord said, 'Woe to you lawyers also, for you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.' It doesn't matter to Mr. Winslow

whether my mother did it or not. I'd prefer to have someone working with her interests in mind."

His mannerisms and voice were those of a mature public speaker. I had to keep blinking my eyes to be sure he was the same person who'd come in the door.

"Let's hear your side of it," I said.

He paused, collected himself, seemed to be waiting for the right beat to come in on. "I can't claim my mother and father had a perfect marriage. They've been rather . . . distant from each other for some time. It was perfectly natural for her to leave the house in which my father had committed adultery. 'Do not look back or stop . . . lest you be consumed.' But that hardly means she would kill. The thought would not even occur to her."

"Do you live with your parents?"

"No. I'm in a dormitory at school. Texas Seminary."

I nodded, made a nonsense note on my blotter. I printed the letters slowly, paying no real attention to them. "Did you get along with your father?"

"I hardly see what that has to do with it."

"Look, Mr. King —"

"Jeffrey."

"All right, Jeffrey, if we're going to work together you're going to have to trust me. If I ask a question, it's probably for a good reason."

He blinked his eyes down, then back up to mine. "My father was a difficult man. I respected him, and I honored him, as I was taught to do."

I decided I was not going to be able to crack Jeffrey King, and that it probably wasn't worth my effort anyway. "All right, Jeffrey," I said, "I'm interested." I recited my rates, adding, "Plus a bonus if I get her off. A hundred will do for a retainer."

"Will a check be all right?"

I nodded, and while he started writing I asked him, "Who do you think did it?"

He finished making out the check, tore it out with a long, backhanded rip. Then he looked at me with smouldering eyes. "The whore," he said. "Charlene Desmond."

"Have you met her?"

"No. But I've read what she said in the newspapers. She's evil, Mr. Sloane. A desperate, misguided woman." He was sounding twice his age again, and I wondered just how much he knew about desperate misguided women.

"What's her motive?"

He shrugged. "Who knows? But she must have known Chico was off on Thursdays. That would be the day when she was used to visiting my father. So when she wanted something from him, she knew when he would be alone. He refused her, probably refused to

continue his relationship with her, and she shot him."

"Um hmm," I said, and picked up the check. "Can I reach you at this number?" He nodded. "All right. I'll get on it right away. If there's anything else I need I'll call you."

He left and I threw open a window. The smell of baking asphalt wafted in from Congress Avenue, but it was an improvement: I called the sheriff's office and asked for Winslow.

"Hello, Sam. This is Dan. Looks like we're going to be working together."

"How's that?" His voice had a tentative sound to it, a little frayed at the edges.

"On the King case. His son hired me."

"Oh really."

"What's wrong? You and Jeannie slug it out again?"

"No. No . . . just can't see why you'd want to bother with the King case. It's all over but the trial."

"Well, maybe so. But I still got to make a living. Listen, can you give me some info? I need to know where the King woman stands."

"Like what?"

"Like did you get prints on the gun?"

"Yeah. They were smeared, but we got two good sets. One hers, one his."

"Do you have an address for Charlene Desmond?" He gave it to me and I wrote it on the blotter. "One more thing," I said. "What

about traffic up at the King house Thursday night. Did you find out anything?"

"The cab companies say none of their people went up there. Neighbors don't remember much." He found a quieter, apologetic tone. "Say, Dan, I have to go."

"Yeah. I understand. See you, Sam." I did understand. I'd been around long enough to know the sound of pressure coming down.

II

IN 1959 I GAVE UP my DA haircut and sold my Chevy and joined the Marines. My girlfriend was very proud of me for about two weeks, then she found somebody who was still in the neighborhood, and that was that. When Kennedy sent the "advisors" to Viet Nam in '61 I was along for the ride, and I was flying choppers by '62. Then my hitch was up, and I was ready to go home. So my sergeant got me drunk and got me to sign a blank piece of paper and I was suddenly in for three more years. They hadn't been able to make their idea of a man out of me, and they wanted another chance.

I didn't want to give it to them. I'd been rooked and they knew it, but the pressure was on. I tried to raise a stink, but it was hopeless, and finally the word came down: if I wanted out badly enough I could have a Dishonorable Discharge. I walked out of the Commandant's

Office in Saigon and watched a Buddhist monk pour gasoline on himself and set himself on fire. I went back into the Commandant's office and talked some more. I finished my hitch at a desk in Germany.

I took my hand-to-hand combat training to Pinkerton while I was at Berkeley on the GI Bill. They used me for muscle while I finished college, and let me do my required two years of investigating when I got out. With my license in hand I proceeded to starve for a year in a Southern California full of private eyes and impoverished kids. It was 1971 and the magic that was Berkeley was dead, along with the magic of most everything else.

I moved back to Austin and found some of it again. The kids were here, and it was a wide open, all night sort of town. The work wasn't much better, but I made do with odd jobs here and there. I made friends, and I found out that I'd been under pressure for a lot more years than I'd known. And now it was all coming back.

I drove down 11th to the Court-house Annex where the Commissioners had their offices. I had nothing particular in mind by visiting the place, but it was close enough to be worth the effort. I found a tree to park under and went inside. The withered smell of the place wrinkled my nose.

King's office was locked with an air of permanence. I tried the door and it echoed hollowly down the

hall. The next one over was open, though, and said Hoyt Crabtree, County Commissioner, so I went in. A drab, middle aged woman looked up from her typing and gave me an encouraging smile.

"Do you have a key to next door by any chance?" I asked her. "I'm working for Jeff King . . ." I let the sentence hang as if it explained everything.

"Oh yes. Jeff was such a nice boy. How is he?"

"Fine," I assured her. I sat on the edge of a table and tried to look cheerful and harmless.

"I'm afraid I don't have a key," she said. "Was it important? I could call the janitor . . ."

I waved my hand. The janitor would doubtless want more credentials than I could offer him. "Not really. Did you know Jason King very well?"

"Oh yes, both him and that dreadful secretary."

"Dreadful?"

"Yes. I can't understand why someone would tell lies like that just to get a fine man like Mr. King in trouble."

"You think she was lying, then?"

She wrinkled her nose. "Pshaw. I'm sure of it. He hadn't the slightest interest in her. I don't think she would have lasted another week, even if that awful scandal business hadn't come up. He was forever having to ask me to help out in getting his work done. I swear he only kept her on as long

as he did out of pity."

A huge man stuck his head out of the back office, then lumbered into view. He must have been six foot six and weighed over two fifty. "Oh, Mr. Crabtree," she piped, "this nice young man is a friend of Jeff King's." I didn't try to correct her.

"Daniel Sloane," I said as he shook my hand, a broad smile on his face and his eyes utterly vacant. He had greying hair that looked like a stack of hay, and when he spoke he sounded like the pedal notes on a pipe organ.

"Pleased to meet you," he boomed, his eyes already wandering around the room. "Terrible thing about Jason, I could hardly believe it." He was headed out the door and hardly seemed conscious of the fact that I was in front of him. He shuffled forward and I backed out of the way, but then he was coming at me again. "Knew him for years," he said, and I found myself standing outside the office. He shook my hand again, and said, "Give my sympathies to the family if you see them, pleasure meeting you." The door closed gently in my face.

It took me a minute, but I calmed down enough to shrug and walk away. I imagined that Crabtree had been having a lot of trouble with reporters and rubber-necks. I sympathized with his position. I still wanted to drop a grenade down his shirt.

Charlene Desmond's house sat

up on a hill overlooking Pease Park and Shoal Creek. It had been a luxury neighborhood years ago, and now was full of college students, like everywhere else in Austin. The place looked deserted but I knocked anyway. After two or three tries, the door opened back on the chain and a woman's voice said, "What do you want?"

I showed her my license and said, "I'm looking for Charlene Desmond." I could see just a little of her face, wrinkled, wearing too much makeup, topped off by salt and pepper hair.

"She's not in."

"Are you a relative?"

"I'm her mother."

"I'd like to ask you a few questions, if I may."

One finger came out from behind the door and pointed at the wallet still in my hand. "Does that mean I have to let you in?"

"No, ma'am. It just means —"

"Oh, mother," came a friendly voice from inside. "Let him in." She shut the door and I heard the rattle of the chain being let off.

The inside of the house smelled faintly of incense. Furniture was sparse, consisting mainly of throw pillows, low tables, and those bedspreads from India that everyone used to have. Sitting on a divan, legs tucked up under her, was a small blonde who I took at first glance to be a little girl. Her eyes had too much makeup, though, and her body was too clearly developed. She was wearing blue

jeans and something I think they call a tube top, that had no other means of support than what she provided herself. She gave me a broad, slightly coy smile. "I'm Charlene Desmond."

"Daniel Sloane. May I sit down?"

"Sure." I took off my coat and sat in the only real chair in the room. She turned and stared at her mother until the older woman left. "Mother has been such a help this last week I can hardly believe it. But she does go too far sometimes. Drink?"

"No thanks," I said. It was too early for me by about five hours. There was a table to my right, by the front window, and she stood at it and poured coke over some bourbon. Light from the drawn venetian blinds made intense stripes across her hands.

"I expect you've had a good share of visitors lately," I said.

"Yes," she said, and took a big slug of the drink. If it weren't for the violence of her makeup and the lines it didn't quite hide around her eyes, I could have taken her for a teenager. "It's pretty exciting, really. I'm used to attention —" here a not quite shy smile — "you know . . . but not anything like this."

"Do you mind if I ask you some questions?"

"That's what I figured you were here for. What sort of questions?"

"I'm a private investigator. I'm trying to clear Mrs. King."

"Oh." She looked down at her glass and shook the ice cubes around in it. She seemed almost embarrassed that I had brought up the idea of the murder.

"How did you get drawn into all this?" I asked.

She shrugged, still looking down. "The usual way, I suppose. I came in from the pool when his regular secretary got married, and I just stayed on." She stubbed out the remains of one cigarette and lit another with a lighter sitting on the table. It was a standard Zippo, with a lightning bolt insignia on it. It was an exact duplicate of the one on Jason King's desk. "Then he asked me out — I guess I'd been there about a week — and I knew better than to say no. I'd had enough trouble getting on there in the first place."

"What sort of trouble?"

"Well, my typing's not very good." She showed me her dimples. "But I have a nice telephone voice, and a good memory."

Her flirting was irritating, not so much on a personal level, but because she didn't seem to be able to turn it off. "How did you finally get hired?" I asked, leaning back and propping my head up with one arm.

"Mr. Crabtree needed somebody one day while I was there trying to get in, and took me. He didn't even know I wasn't in the pool. Then they sort of had to let me in. It's complicated. Like a

union, sort of." She finished her drink and went over to get another one. "Sure you won't join me?" she asked.

I shook my head. The inertia was starting to get to me, and I felt like I was wasting my time. The woman was shallow and a little on the cheap side, but she didn't strike me as a killer. She lit another cigarette and I asked her about the lighter.

"Did that belong to Jason?"

She looked down at it as if she'd never seen it before. "I suppose so," she said. The whiskey seemed to be affecting her. "The Thundermugs . . . must have been his outfit, huh?"

She reminded me of a high school kid just out for the summer. She seemed disjointed, adrift in the moment. It was all a big vacation, and Jason King had paid the bill, first in publicity and now with his life.

By the third drink she was talking about King without being prompted. She had the conversation under her arm and was running with it.

"He was a nice man. Not a big spender, but not a tightwad. He'd take me out sometimes. Sometimes we'd go to his house. He lives out by the lake. Once we went down to the beach by his house, it was late at night, and we made love right there, in front of God and everybody."

I'd had enough. I stood up and looked around for my coat. "You

can knock it off now, Miss Desmond," I said. "You were no more Jason King's mistress than I was. You don't know enough about him to talk for a full minute without repeating yourself. There's no beach by King's house. There's a rocky ledge, but believe me lady, I wouldn't try it. The reporter that bought your story should be kicked out on his ass."

She sat up, stunned. She looked as though I'd hit her. "Now look here," she said, her words a little slurred. "I don't want that kind of language in this house."

"Did you come up with this little scheme on your own or did somebody put you up to it?" I walked over to her, but not close enough to have to smell the whiskey.

"I think you should get out," she snarled. "Mother!" Her voice got shrill and I put my coat on.

"Call me if you change your mind," I said, and stalked out of the house.

Driving back to the office, I made a quick recap. If the Desmond woman was out, that left me high and dry. I had two suspects left, the kid who'd hired me and the woman I was supposed to clear. I'd scored one point though, since Marion King's motive was pretty well shot. Charlene Desmond's story couldn't have held water at the bottom of the ocean, and I doubted that Mrs. King would have fallen for it.

I parked around the corner from my office and went into the GM

Steakhouse. After a \$2.07 sirloin and a large milk I was in a better mood. After all, I had a client and a hundred dollars. What could go wrong?

The phone was ringing when I got back to the office. I caught it in time, and heard Winslow's voice.

"Found out who our bathing beauty was," he said. "His name was Ernie Singleton. He was a grunt in Korea, lost the leg there. Last residence was Dayton, Ohio. No relatives, no friends, no nothin'."

"So why did he come here?" I asked.

"To drown, looks like."

"Ha ha. I got a hot one for you, now. The King sex scandal was a put up job."

"That's not too funny. You got proof?"

"I don't need it. The chick is as phoney as a three dollar bill. She'd never wash in court."

"Well maybe the wife believed her."

"Hey look," I said, "I've heard of blind justice, but don't you think you're carrying this a bit too far? Don't you even want to check this out?"

I listened to a long silence on the other end of the wire, then Winslow said, "Uh, something's come up. I'll get back to you, okay?" and he was gone.

I held the dead receiver in my hand for a minute, then hung up and dialed the *Austin Statesman*. "City desk, please."

I had time to tap my fingers on the desk a couple of times and scratch my nose, then a voice said, "Hello?"

"Bennie? This is Dan."

"Let's see. . . Dan. . . Dan. . ."

"Don't rub it in, I'm sorry. I've just been out of circulation for a while."

"I'll say. Did you marry her?"

"No, I got out at the last minute. It was close, though. Listen I may have a story for you in a bit. I need some information first, though. Like who would a County Commissioner have for an enemy?"

"A bad enough enemy to bump him off, you mean? I thought the wife did it."

"Maybe not that bad. Maybe just bad enough to throw a little dirt on him."

Bennie whistled. "That way, huh? Okay, I can give you a list. How long you got?"

"Just hit the high points."

"A County Commissioner wears a lot of hats, friend. To start with, of course, it could be somebody who lost an election to him, or thinks he could take over the job. Or one of the other Commissioners. But what you're after probably has to do with County contracts."

"Whoa. What sort of contracts?"

"Mainly roads, but all the contracts are let through Commissioner's Court. That includes libraries, parks, hospitals, you

name it."

"Good. What else?"

"Commissioners appoint county officials, run the welfare department, handle the budget and all that. Each Commissioner is responsible for the roads in his precinct, and since King used to be in construction, you've got a tie in there. He could have brought along some old enemies when he moved up. Let's see, there's a bond issue coming up, but the contracts on that haven't been given out yet, so I'm afraid that's no help."

"It's help," I said, "but I wish you could have narrowed it down a bit more."

"That's the breaks, kid. Now what about that scoop?"

"I'll let you know. Bye."

So there I sat. Not at a dead end, but facing an endless field of possibility. The bond issue may or may not have been important; it had been on his desk when he was killed, but I had no way of knowing what it meant.

I looked at my cards, and I was holding no suspects, no clues, and didn't even have a long suit. It was time to get some help.

III

I STILL HAD FRIENDS at the county jail, and they hustled Marion King into a visitor's booth for me in no time at all. I could tell from her bearing that she was merely allowing the guard to lead

her. She had a lot of dignity and authority in her walk. They were obviously treating her with respect; she was still in her street clothes and her long brown hair was neatly brushed out. Her eyes looked dull and resigned, but she gave me a weary smile anyway. "My guard thinks pretty highly of you," she said. She was naturally gracious, had an instinctive ability to put people at their ease.

"I try to get along," I smiled. She was a handsome woman, with a sort of strength that denied the years that were visible in her face. She settled herself in the chair beyond the glass and waited.

"I'm not sure where to start," I said, "but if it means anything to you, I know your husband was not involved with Charlene Desmond."

Her mouth made an ugly line across her face. "Tell me something new. Jason would have no more had that tramp for a mistress than he would have robbed a bank. He just didn't have it in him."

"Just how do you mean that?" I asked, intrigued by the hint of resentment in her tone.

She sighed. "You've met Jeff, so I think you can understand. Jason was very much like Jeff, without the religious mania. That's why they didn't get along — they were so similar. Both of them were so demanding, so harsh, even toward themselves. There were times when I wished Jason would have taken a mis-

tress, anything, just to get him out of his shell. But I'm sure you didn't come here to listen to my discontents." She was the hostess again, detached from her surroundings.

"On the contrary. I'll take any information I can get right now. Do you have any idea who might have killed your husband?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Sloane, but I never kept up with my husband's business."

"Couldn't it have been somebody from his personal life?"

"What personal life? If he had someone over to the house it was either in connection with the county or with his construction work."

"He was still active in construction, then?"

"Only as a consultant. Anything else would have constituted conflict of interest. Not that he couldn't have gotten away with it, of course, this *is* Texas, but my husband was a very scrupulous man."

"Why did you move out on him, then, if you'll pardon my asking?"

"I didn't move out. I went to stay with my sister because she was ill. Jason hardly cared whether I was there or not, and both of us knew the scandal was nonsense. I saw no reason to stay around simply to avoid gossip."

"I'd like to talk with your sister. Where does she live?"

"Off Cameron Road, north of the airport." She gave me the

address. "Her name is Jenny Shaw. She lives alone. That's why she needed me."

I was silent for a moment, looking at the sunlight through the intersecting lines of the barred window.

"Do you — " Her voice caught and she cleared her throat. "Do you think they'll convict me?"

I shrugged. "It would help if you'd tell me what you know."

She looked me in the eyes and said, "I already have." It was not too bad, but she shouldn't have pulled her eyes away at the end. I stared at her for a minute, but it was no use. I wasn't going to get anything more out of her.

"If you think of anything else that might help at all, tell your guard. She'll get word to me somehow." I couldn't shake the feeling that she was hiding something, but I had no clue as to how to get at it.

The sergeant at the desk let me use the phone.

"Jeff? This is Dan Sloane."

"How are you. Any news?" He didn't sound particularly concerned.

He and Winslow had both given me scenarios of the murder, and now a third one was taking shape in my mind. It was ugly, and I wanted to get rid of it. It started with Jeff waiting till the house was empty on Thursday night to confront his father. They quarrelled, Jason walked away, and Jeff reached for the gun. Then he

stopped and wrapped his hand in a handkerchief so he wouldn't leave any prints . . .

No. No soap. People who shoot in anger worry about prints afterward, not before. Still, he seemed to have a real martyrdom compulsion, and people have been known to hire detectives to punish themselves. In more ways than one.

"Your friend the scarlet woman didn't do it," I said. "Your father never gave her anything but letters to type. And not many of those, from what I hear."

"It seems I've made a serious mistake. And it's too late to rectify it."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I had an awful, sinking feeling that the kid was about to confess. I held on tight to the receiver.

"He has cursed his father . . . his blood is upon him."

"Jeff, have you got an alibi?"

"I beg your pardon?" He sounded like I'd just woken him up.

"Where were you when your father was killed?"

"With a bible study group."

"Can you prove it?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Nothing," I said. "Never mind." I sighed, a little, and began to understand what Marion King had been talking about. If his quotations didn't get me, his self-righteousness would. I decided to give him written reports from that point on. I said good bye and drove

out to Cameron Road.

The house was mass produced, built to last three years and now in its fourth. I parked at the curb, and a herd of little kids rattled past me on plastic tricycles with huge front wheels. I noticed that the lawn had lost its battle with Johnson grass.

Jenny Shaw answered the front door with a wary smile. "I'm Daniel Sloane," I said. "I'm a private investigator." In all the years I'd been doing it, I'd yet to find a positive name for it. When I introduced myself I had to be ready to face hostility and distrust. The private detective had lost all his glamour, was back to being the dirty little peeper at the window. Sometimes I felt that way about myself.

"Come in," she said, and held the door open. She was cast out of the same mold as her sister, with the same rich chocolate colored hair and the same large but attractive features. Her hair was cut shorter, though, and fell in a more relaxed way. Her eyes were brighter, less strained. She was perhaps five years younger, but looked more like ten. She was one of the more attractive women I'd seen in a while, and washed Charlene Desmond from my memory like a long drink of water.

"Could I get you a cup of coffee?" she asked. "Or something stronger?"

"Coffee would be fine. Please."

I sat on the edge of a chair and

looked at the prints on the walls. Her taste ran to symbolists and expressionists. She came back with two cups of coffee and handed me one. "There's cream and sugar on the table," she said, pointing.

"Black is fine."

She sat on the sofa and examined me. "You're working for my sister?"

"Your nephew, actually," I said, "but it comes to the same thing."

"How can I help you?"

"I'm not sure. I seem to be losing ground faster than I'm gaining. All I know at this point is that someone set Jason King up for that scandal. Maybe the secretary, maybe someone behind her. It might even be a reverse blackmail scheme, where they would have dropped the charges if King paid them. Whoever set it up probably killed him, or is at least involved in the murder somehow. But I don't have any clue as to who it is. I think your sister does, but she won't tell me."

There was a long silence. I could tell she was thinking something over, and I didn't want to give her an opportunity to let it go. At last she said, "Can I trust you?"

I shrugged. "That's a pretty vague term. If you mean will I lie, cheat and steal to protect a client, no. If you mean do I have a conscience, yes, but I put caution and common sense above it."

"That's a fair answer," she

said. "You see there's . . . something I didn't tell the police. I may have been wrong, but then again they never asked the right questions, either. They seemed to have their minds made up, and I saw no need to bring something up that might look, well, compromising for my sister."

"The police have a little trouble thinking along more than one track at once," I agreed, thinking with regret of Winslow.

"The day of the murder — that is, the afternoon before it — Marion got a call here. I answered it and it was a man's voice, a soft, gentle voice. He asked for her by her first name, so I didn't think it was a reporter or anything. It even sounded sort of familiar somehow. Anyway, I let her talk to him. I went in the next room, and I only heard bits and pieces of her side of the conversation."

"Can you remember anything, anything at all?"

"Well, at first she sounded really shocked, stunned, to hear the voice. She sounded as if she didn't believe it. Then she got very quiet. I had to come back in the room for something and I heard the tail end of it. She said something like 'all right, eight o'clock at Jason's' or something like that. I know she was making a date to meet him there. Does that make sense to you?"

"It makes a lot of sense. Whoever that was could be our black-mailer. Did he happen to say

where he got your number?"

"No, but it would have to be from Chico or Jason, wouldn't it?"

I agreed that it would. "One more question. This could be a hard one. Do you think your sister was having an affair?"

"No. Not that she wasn't capable of it. She certainly didn't have enough feeling for Jason to stop her. It's just that I suppose she hadn't had a good enough offer. That's usually the case, isn't it?" Her smile was enigmatic, and too sad to be threatening.

"Would there be anybody else she might be trying to protect?"

"Not that I know of. *Cherchez l'homme*, is that it?"

"Right. Just find a man with a gentle, soft spoken voice. No problem."

I got ready to leave. She took my hand at the door. "I think you're a good person, Mr. Sloane. I'm glad you're on our side."

I didn't know what to say. It was too sudden, after having had doors slammed in my face all day. I muttered a thank you and walked out to the car.

So now I had a suspect again. A man with a voice. Marion had set up an appointment with him, possibly to pay the blackmail. But what was her relationship to him? Was she involved in the set up? Was she the killer herself?

The warm openness of the afternoon was telling me to call it a day. My eyes burned and I felt heavy and sour with sweat. The air was

just right for a swim, or at least a sunbath. And part of me wanted to go back to the little peeling house and ask Jenny Shaw to dinner.

I fought off all the evil impulses. The devil, as I was sure Jeff King would have told me, was finding work for my idle hands. I had plenty of time still to go out to the house on the lake. So I slammed my car into gear and rattled off toward Lake Travis.

IV

"NO SIR, I DON'T KNOW." A trace of accent still touched his voice, but it was barely noticeable. He had lines of sorrow etched in his face, and I saw Jason King in the new light of the respect, perhaps even friendship, he had earned from this man. "I hadn't heard the voice before. But I trusted him, somehow. He said he was an old, old friend of Mrs. King's, and I believed him."

I paced up and down the kitchen, unable to put my finger on what was bothering me. It had started when I walked in the house, and wouldn't let me go.

"Did Mr. King leave the house much at night? To go out to a nightclub or eat or anything?"

"No sir. Particularly not lately, since his car has been in the shop."

I turned to him. He looked like an old man in the steeply filtered light of the afternoon. "You mean he had no car the night of the

murder?"

A look of anguish came over the man's face. "No sir. I wanted to stay with him, but he said he would be all right. I wish I had stayed anyway. I feel as if . . ."

"Don't blame yourself," I said. "There's nothing you could have done." Suddenly I wanted to go to the study. I couldn't explain it, but the hunch was strong, and was reason enough in itself. "I need to go upstairs. Is that all right?"

Chico nodded. "Of course. You are a friend of Mr. Winslow's. Please make yourself at home."

Everything was just the same as it had been the day before. The chalk outline of the body stared up at me from the carpet. I walked around the room, reading the titles of books off the shelves, then came back to the desk. I opened the book of photos and paged through them from the beginning. There were school pictures, through high school, and in several of these and later ones I saw a younger version of Marion King. In two of them there was another man. One picture didn't have Jason in it at all.

Marion and the man were posed in front of a fountain. They had their arms around each other, laughing. I felt instinctively that Jason had taken the picture himself, and they were laughing at something he'd said. I stared at the man's face. I tried to visualize it older, with wrinkles. Then I tried to see it with various combinations of facial hair. Finally I tried to see

it heavier, with jowls, or bloated with fat.

Then I had it.

I called the sheriff's department. A voice told me Winslow was out, but I didn't try to force the issue. I asked for McCarthy and got him.

"I understand I'm not too popular down there," I said.

"Not very, but you didn't hear that from me."

"Thanks, Ed. Listen, you got a teletype from Washington with the file on a GI named Singleton, Ernie Singleton. You think you could find it for me; it just came in today."

"I'll check. Hold on."

After a moment I heard a sound of pages rustling on McCarthy's end. "Got it," he said.

"I need his war record. See if it lists who his commanding officer was at the time he was wounded." There was more rattling of paper. Then the sound stopped and there was a long pause.

"Did Sam see this?" McCarthy asked.

"I don't think he paid much attention to it. C'mon, let's have it."

"I think you know."

"Tell me anyway."

"Wounded 13 May 1953. Commanding officer Lt. J. King."

THE JAIL WAS TWILIGHT dark, dismal, eternal. The kind of light that things and people disappear in. A ragged light came

on in the ceiling as they let me into her cell.

I didn't waste my time. If Marion King had murdered her husband, I had spent a long day for nothing: I had to find out.

"Ernie's dead, Mrs. King. You can stop covering up for him now."

She whirled on me with fiery eyes. "How do you know about that?"

"I fished him out of Lake Travis yesterday. It looked to me like he'd been murdered, but it was none of my business at the time. As to your relationship to him, what I know is just from legwork. I want you to tell me the rest of it. I don't want to threaten you, but if the DA finds out about Ernie it could look bad for you."

I'd pumped the anger right out of her. She sat down on the hard cot. "How far back?"

"All the way. If you tell me something I already know, I can stand it."

"All right." She took a breath. "Ernie and Jason and I were a threesome. Jason and Ernie were best friends. They both loved me. This was in the early fifties. Jason was in ROTC in high school, and he went to Korea when he graduated. So did Ernie, as a private. When they got back, I was to have decided who I was going to marry. I don't know which I would have chosen, but I didn't have to decide. Ernie didn't come back." Her voice stayed level, but the

tears were starting in her eyes. I didn't interrupt her.

"The first I knew he was alive was when he called me two days ago. I nearly fainted. He told me he had something important to tell Jason and me, and he sounded like he was in trouble. We set up a time to meet at Jason's house. He didn't show up."

"Ernie was missing a leg, Mrs. King. He lost it in Korea, under your husband's command. Given the circumstances, I think he might have been bitter toward your husband, even blamed him for the injury."

She was hiding her face, and her shoulders trembled a little. "Jason confessed to me that night, before he was killed. He left Ernie to die. It was the only evil thing he ever did in his life, and he's suffered for it ever since, inside."

"I don't know why Ernie waited so long to come back, but yes, Ernie had plenty of cause to hate my husband. Do you think he killed Jason?"

I shook my head. "It just doesn't work out. If it was murder and suicide, how did Ernie get to the house? The police checked the cab companies, and they were all negative. He couldn't have gotten very far without a crutch, but none was found anywhere near the body." I shook my head again. "You don't get a lump like that falling through thirty feet of water. You're just not moving fast

enough. Unless he hit himself over the head, he was murdered."

"By my husband?"

"No. Same reasons. How would your husband have brought him there? His car is in the shop. Likewise Ernie's crutch, his clothes, any other personal effects. Your husband had no way to get rid of them. And it doesn't make sense that he'd kill Ernie at the foot of his own driveway. It's too obvious."

"So who killed my husband? Who killed Ernie?"

"I don't know. I just don't know."

V

IT HAD BECOME TIME for a drink, a little past it, in fact. I sat in a rocking chair on my front porch with a glass of straight rye and thought about luck. Some people had it, some didn't. I had gotten close, built up a good, solid case. But unless I could produce the real killer or killers, I had wasted my time. The State could turn Ernie Singleton into a whole new motive and put Marion King away despite all my beautiful logic.

The only clues I had left might not have been clues at all. The bond election, which might or might not have made an enemy for Jason King. The steel book which might or might not have been used to discover a piece of shaky engineering. The words "green

Chevy" and a phone number, which might refer to a new car to replace the one in the shop.

Frustration was eating up my gut. I could say goodbye to a night's sleep unless I did something.

I went into the living room and got out a piece of paper. I sat by the phone and wrote out two numbers. One of them belonged to Jenny Shaw. The other I had memorized from the pad on the dead man's desk. I tore the sheet in half and folded the numbers, then mixed them up on the desk.

~~If Jenny Shaw's number came~~ up, I was going to take her out and buy her a drink, or maybe several, if she would have me. If the other number came up I would at least exhaust my remaining clue. I closed my eyes and picked one.

It was the number from King's desk. My stomach was heaving worse, now, and I wondered if I weren't making a mistake. Almost certainly there would be no answer at all, at worst an irate stranger that I'd pulled away from his TV. But that was not what I was afraid of. I was afraid that a murderer would answer the phone and I had no idea what I was going to say to him.

I dialed the number. My hand shook and I loused it up the first time. So I dialed it again.

The phone rang once, twice, three times. It took an eternity. I was starting to breathe easier when I heard a sharp click.

"Hello," said a deep, booming voice. My stomach lurched and my mouth dried up. I recognized the voice, and I started adding things up that should have been obvious long before.

"Is this Hoyt Crabtree?" I said, forcing my voice low.

"Of course it is. What do you want?"

I took a shot at it. "Bonds. I want to talk to you about some county bonds." My brain spun while I waited for his answer. If he bit, then Crabtree was in it up to his gills. If not, then I was at ~~another dead end.~~

"Maybe you'd better come over here," he said at last. "I think we need to talk."

"Maybe I'd better. What's the address?" I wrote it down, my pulse hammering in my ears. "I'll be right over," I said.

HE LIVED OVER THE RIVER, west of town. I parked in his driveway, behind a green Chevy, and walked up to his door. For a moment I wished for a gun, but I knew it wouldn't do me any good. In any situation where I needed it I probably wouldn't get the chance.

I was right. A big cowboy answered the door, let me in, then threw me at a wall. I leaned against it, stunned, and fought back the reactions that started to come over me. I concentrated on the man's hands as he searched me in the clumsy, embarrassed manner that country people have

when they have to touch another man. When he was done I turned and looked at him, seeing limp blonde hair, a western shirt, jeans. I might have hit him, but at that moment I noticed Crabtree.

He sat casually in an armchair, and there was another big cowboy to his right. There was a dull look to Crabtree's face, and a big .38 in his hand. "Sit down," he said, and I sat on the couch behind me. My head felt soft and pulpy.

"So you're the private eye. Yes, I know who you are. I checked you out after you came snooping around the office. I'm amazed at your persistence." There was malice in his eyes and the shaggy white hair brought out the red in them.

"While you were checking that out," I asked, "you didn't happen to mention anything to the sheriff about a nice quick conviction for Mrs. King did you?" The man by the door reacted to Crabtree's expression and slapped me across the face. He carried a lot of weight, and my head almost went into the wall again.

Crabtree's gun barrel came to rest in line with my stomach. "You won't need to hit him again," he said. "He's going to tell us all he knows."

I didn't like his attitude. "I know a lot of things," I said. "Two and two are four, Lincoln is the capital of Nebraska . . ."

The hammer of the gun clicked back. It was cheap drama but

effective.

"You may have to help me a little," I said slowly. "But I think I have most of it now. Jason King caught you taking kickbacks on road contracts. He knew enough about the business to know your contractors were cutting corners. So you scared up a sex scandal to get him out of the way.

"Then he got something on you. Not the scandal, obviously. You wouldn't kill somebody as important as King over a little thing like that. But you would kill somebody you thought might not be missed. Like Ernie Singleton. That's what Jason King found out, and that's why you had to kill him."

Crabtree laughed. "Who's Ernie Singleton?"

"He's the boy who *really* had the goods on King. He showed up at Charlene's, for some reason, and offered to throw in with her. He left a lighter behind that had an insignia of the outfit that he and King were in. I don't know what he offered her, but she was afraid to handle it herself. That was when she made her mistake and called you in.

"That tipped Ernie off that something was phoney, and I'm sure it didn't take him long to find out what it was. But he knew about your connection, so he had to go. You dumped him in the lake because it was as good a place as any, and because if the body did show up it would only be something else for Jason King to ex-

plain. Only our local police didn't make the connection, and by then it was too late anyway.

"Because Jason King had been watching for Ernie, and he saw your car. A green Chevy. I saw it just now, outside. He recognized it and called you up."

"I like your imagination," Crabtree said.

"Not imagination. King doodled while he talked on the phone, and it's all on paper. When you came over, he pulled a gun, shot him carefully in the back of the head, and ran. What could you lose? Mrs. King was perfect to take the rap."

I noticed that I was trembling, and the adrenalin in my system was reaching a critical level. Crabtree said, "I don't think anybody will believe that."

"Sure they will." My voice sounded like it was coming from the other side of a waterfall. "Not the murders alone, or the scandal. But throw in the bond deals, the pressure on the sheriff's office — it's clear as a bell. Your name is the one thing that ties everything together."

Crabtree seemed to think it over. "Maybe you're right," he said. "Let's go for a ride."

I got to my feet. I could feel the oppressive heat in the room as if it were a jungle, and my nose was full of that sickly sweet Asian smell that I'd never been able to wash away. I was shaking with the tension of it.

Charlene Desmond burst into the room. Her face was puffy and red, and she was staggering. "Hoyt, you lied to me," she shrieked. "You killed that soldier, and you promised there wouldn't be anything like that! And Mr. King! You . . ." I saw her move through the air at him, fists bunched up in little girl style.

"Look out, you idiot!" Crabtree yelled, but he was too late. She had deflected the gun and I had lost control.

I had gone icy cold and everything was moving in slow motion. I hadn't wanted it to happen, but the Marine Corp's instincts had taken over and there was nothing I could do to stop it. My stiffened hand took Crabtree's wrist, and I felt the bones shatter under it. I kicked the gun in the corner and planted my foot in the closest of the cowboys. He went down and the other one swung at me. I slipped under his arm easily and started punching, short hard throws of the fists with a snap at the end. He sank to the floor.

I turned to Crabtree, breathing hard and looking for something to kill. I stood in front of him, blood lust racking my body and my hands shaking with it. I fought for control, got it back, lost it, got it back again. My eyes cleared and my head pounded like a jackhammer. Then my knees got soft and I was all right again.

"Call the police," I said to Charlene, and watched her until

she did it. The room was quiet, and Crabtree's eyes, full of hatred, followed me as I sat in a chair. I remembered the pistol, finally, and picked it up out of the corner.

When she finished on the phone Charlene sat on the couch across from me. "He still loved her," she said, her voice drunkenly sentimental. "He stayed away because he loved her. He only came back because he thought her husband had betrayed her."

I realized she was talking about Ernie Singleton. "He didn't want to hurt Mr. King, I know he didn't. He was just angry. I don't think he would have done it. He just loved her, that was all. Isn't it sweet?" She looked up at me with wet red eyes. "Isn't it just too sweet?"

Eventually the police arrived.

AT SIX IN THE MORNING Winslow had let me go. Crabtree was behind bars and Marion King was out. It was over.

"You've still got your license," Winslow had said to me, "but then it wasn't my decision." I looked for a trace of the friendship that we'd still had only two days before, but it was gone. A hundred things came to mind, but none of them would have made any difference if I'd said them. I'd made everybody look bad, and stepped out of line time after time. People didn't forget things like that easily. Maybe after a few months we'd all be friends again. I'd go

back to Winslow's house for dinner and we'd get drunk on beer and laugh it all off. But I thought not. We'd learned too much about each other in the last two days for things to ever be the same again.

Jeff King was waiting for me when I came down the steps. He must have been there for hours. He gave me a check for five hundred dollars and an anemic smile. "God bless you," he said to me. I shook his hand and drove away.

I was too full of coffee, too hypertense, too frightened by the Viet Nam flashback to get any sleep. So I drove out to Lake Travis and watched the sun come up over the water. I changed into a bathing suit and swam out into the chilly waters of the lake. It was going to be another beautiful, clear, broiling hot day. There would be more days like it, and suddenly it was going to be fall, and Austin would have tricked us out of another year.

That was when I hated the city, the times when it fooled you into thinking that the days would never end, that time itself did not exist. It had fooled Jason King, and he had let that ugly part of his past slide away, and believed it could not touch him. But time was there, deep as a lake, without pity or sorrow or love. A man could drown in it.

I swam back to the shore and fell asleep under the neutral, staring eye of the sun. ●

THE REAPER'S SCYTHE

by W.L. FIELDHOUSE

Major Lansing of the CID trails a phantom killer, and the suspects are as bizarre as the murder itself. A religious fanatic, a sinister Oriental, a cult of Neo-Nazis, and the ghost of a mad devil-worshipper comprise the strangest list of possible killers Lansing has ever encountered!

MAJOR LANSING tried to shrug off the strange uneasiness that infected him as he followed the

German police into the forest. It was the pre-dawn fog, he decided. The dense gray mist covered the

area. Trees were blurred shadows, dark giants looming over him like ominous ogres. *Of course, thought Lansing. The fact I'm here to inspect a body — possibly an American serviceman and a probable homicide — might have something to do with my present state of mind.*

Yet another reason for Lansing's concern was the attitude of the policemen. The German police are among the toughest, hardest-nosed cops in the world, but the pair guiding Lansing into the forest were as nervous as a virgin on her wedding night. *Well, he considered, the police in a little Bavarian hamlet like Einhornsdorf probably aren't accustomed to murder investigations.*

They approached a small stream trickling between the trees. The rotten-egg scent of sulfur suggested a nearby factory was careless about dumping industrial waste. Flashlight beams danced for a moment, then fell upon the lifeless figure lying in the mud near the bank.

"Der Leichman ist dort," one of the cops whispered, pointing toward the still body.

"Ja," Lansing replied as he moved closer.

Although the corpse was dressed in civilian clothing, Lansing had little doubt the victim had been a U.S. soldier. Young, no older than twenty-two, the corpse's blond hair was cut GI-short. The dead man's shoes

added to Lansing's suspicions. Even smeared with muck, the Major knew a pair of Army low-quarters when he saw them.

A former Detroit police detective, Vietnam combat veteran, and currently a homicide investigator for the Army's Criminal Investigation Department, Lansing had seen countless corpses, but few had suffered a wound more ghastly than the mud-splattered body lying before him. The man's throat appeared to have been literally ripped open.

"You didn't find any identification?" the Major asked in German.

"We did not search the body, *mein herr*," one of the cops admitted.

Lansing stared at him. "Why didn't you?"

"We" The Policeman hesitated. "We didn't want to disturb anything for your investigation, *Herr Major*."

"How considerate," Lansing muttered dryly.

The fog was beginning to lift as the pale morning sun finally rose. Lansing's flashlight beam cut through the fading mist to strike an unusual shape among the shadows.

"What's that?" he asked, straining his eyes to peer into the fog.

"It is nothing. Just an old house," one of the police replied quickly. "No one lives there."

"Nonetheless, any structure

this close to the scene of a murder should be investigated," Lansing remarked, wondering what was wrong with the Police.

Approaching the shadowy object, Lansing discovered a seven-foot-tall gate. Beyond the iron bars, a large dark house with a slanted slate roof and unlit windows seemed to materialize amid the fog. Lansing pulled at the gate, but it wouldn't budge.

"The owner has the keys, *Herr Major*," a Policeman explained. "A man named Osato Ken."

"Japanese, eh? Where is he?"

"He lives several miles from here. He only comes to Zeitler House once a week and always in the daylight."

"Well, I don't want to enter the premises without Osato's permission . . ."

Lansing suddenly noticed a tall figure in the middle of the lawn between the house and the gate. Through the drifting fog, the outline of a man appeared, a man wearing a hooded garment and carrying a long-handled object over his shoulder.

"What the hell?" Lansing muttered, his heart racing as he turned the flashlight on the sinister figure. He nearly gasped when the light fell on the apparition's face. It was a gray skull! Bare teeth formed a frozen grin and the empty eyesockets somehow seemed to glare back at the startled Major.

"Oh, it's just a statue," Lansing

said with relief.

Just a statue was not an accurate description. It was an extremely realistic sculpture of *The Grim Reaper*, the personification of Death. The folds of the gray stone "robe" appeared likely to stir at any moment, and the skeletal hands holding the shaft of the scythe almost seemed to move as the flashlight beam danced across them.

"Somebody has a macabre taste for lawn decorations," Lansing remarked. "Have you seen this thing?" he asked, turning to the police.

Both cops nodded woodenly, their expressions taut, their complexions ashen. *What's with these guys?* Lansing thought. *They're terrified!*

THE TELEPHONE on Brigadier General Clayton's desk rang twice before he answered it. A stout man with a bull neck and a passion for the military, General Clayton had served as commander of the Criminal Investigation Department in USAEUR (United States Army in Europe) for almost two years. Clayton immediately recognized the caller's voice.

"Hello Major," he said, speaking around a thick cigar. "What did you find in Einhorn-door?"

"Einhorndorf, sir," Lansing replied. "I found the body. It's an American GI. We fished him out of the mud and retrieved his

wallet, dog tags, Army ID and other paraphernalia. His name was Jasper Early, 752-25-5385. According to his meal and ration cards he was a private first class assigned to Alpha Battery, Dyer Barracks."

"How did he die, Major?"

"His throat was torn out. Offhand, I'd guess the murder instrument was a large hook . . ." Lansing felt a shiver crawl up his backbone as he recalled *The Grim Reaper* statue. "Or possibly some sort of sickle."

"A sickle?" Clayton raised his bushy white eyebrows. "Sounds like Early was involved with a farmer's wife or daughter and the old man caught him out by the barn."

"Perhaps, sir," Lansing said. "But there are a number of strange circumstances connected with this case."

"Such as?"

"Well, the local police are eager to wash their hands of the whole business. Of course, Einhornsdorf is a very small and rather backward village. I've seen only two cars here, and one of them is mine. Everybody, even the police, ride bicycles. There aren't many phones in town. The one I'm using is in the local tavern. It's one of those old crank-handle models, the type one generally sees only in museums. Perhaps this is their first homicide. The whole town is uneasy." Lansing took a deep breath. "Then there

are circumstances concerning the area the corpse was found in. It was lying in a patch of mud roughly twelve feet wide, yet the only visible tracks belonged to the victim."

"What?" the General asked with surprise.

"Early left footprints, deep footprints, in the mud. The killer *didn't*."

"Perhaps Early was assaulted before he reached the mud and he staggered into it and died."

"I checked the area carefully, sir, but I couldn't find a trace of blood outside the mud. I'd say he was killed where we found him."

"Then you shouldn't have any trouble finding suspects, Major," Clayton said dryly. "There can't be too many men in Germany with arms ten feet long."

"I'm sure there's another explanation, General. I just don't know what it is yet."

"If anyone can solve it, you're the man," the General stated confidently. "Will you be returning soon?"

"I want to check out a house near the scene of the crime. I'll probably be here a while longer."

"Very well, Major. Good luck."

"Thank you, sir," Lansing managed to say before he heard the General hang up the phone.

Replacing the earpiece to the hook-cradle of the tavern phone, Lansing turned to silently study his patrons. Germans are basically a good-natured people who

enjoy their beer drinking with plenty of conversation and laughter. However, the Einhornrdorf citizens resembled professional mourners. No one spoke above a whisper, laughed or even smiled.

Six-feet-three-inches tall, leanly built, his short brown hair gray at the temples, Lansing was not the sort of man to be unnoticed in a crowd. Dressed in a Class-A U.S. Army uniform, he stood out among the German civilians like a raven at a swan convention, yet no one raised a head as Lansing walked across the room.

"Someone should tell him," muttered a squat, middle-aged man with a face resembling a mistreated beagle.

"Sssh!" the man on the barstool beside him urged, "The *Polizei* said he understands German."

"So? He should know," the first patron insisted, raising a beer mug to his lips.

"What should I know, *Mein Herr*?" Lansing inquired as he approached the simple, wooden bar.

"Do you believe in *Gesperstes*, *Herr Major*?" the beagle-faced man asked flatly.

"Ghosts?" Lansing replied, the tone of his voice revealing his surprise.

"You will never catch this murderer, Major," the man stated, and drained his beer mug. "The thing that killed your soldier isn't human."

With that, the German rose from the barstool and headed for the door. He stopped suddenly as three men entered. Even the whispers ceased abruptly. Lansing, turning to see the trio of newcomers, received yet another start. They were dressed in black uniforms, service caps and jack boots. Two of the men were young and athletically fit, with chevrons on their sleeves and truncheons attached to their web belts.

The third man was sandwiched between the pair of hard cases. A neatly trimmed black and gray beard decorated his jaw and a silver diamond-shaped insignia reflected light on each shoulder. All three men wore white arm-bands bearing a black "X" inside a red circle.

"*Sehen! Ein Amerikaner!*" one of the younger men snapped, thrusting a finger at Lansing.

The Major tensed as the two muscle-boys glared at him with unconcealed hostility. Lansing prepared for a possible attack, planning to seize the nearest barstool to shield himself from the truncheons.

"*Entspannen*," the bearded man urged, raising a hand calmly. "The American is not hurting anything." Turning to the bartender, he said, "We have come for the beer. My men will help you load the kegs onto the truck. It is parked in the rear."

The bartender nodded and disappeared through a door be-

hind the counter. Glancing at Lansing with unfriendly eyes, the two younger men in black followed the bartender.

"I hope my men did not offend you, Major," the fellow with the beard said, stepping closer.

"I'll get over it," Lansing replied dryly. "I'm afraid I don't recognize your insignia, but your face seems familiar."

"You may have seen my picture in the newspaper or perhaps on television. I'm Colonel Klaus Bohler of *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders*, Germany for Germans."

"Yeah, I remember now," Lansing nodded. "Your people spend a lot of time making speeches and distributing pamphlets. I'm not quite sure whether *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders* is a paramilitary organization or a political party."

"We are both," Bohler smiled. "The key to a successful political system is a strong military."

"Or the other way around, Lansing suggested. "I seem to recall you were arrested last year for handing out Nazi literature in Nuremburg."

"True," Bohler admitted. "Adolf Hitler was a very wise man and a strong leader who successfully united the German people. Of course, we are not Nazis, but one needn't dismiss National Socialism altogether because it had a few shortcomings."

"Shortcomings like enforcing a

police state, concentration camps, declaring war on other countries, little things like that," Lansing commented sarcastically.

"A police state has order, Major," Bohler remarked. "Something today's Germany sorely lacks. As for the other matters you mentioned, *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders* has never endorsed such actions. We favor simply what our title implies; Germany should be *for* Germans. Belong to Germans, run by Germans and inhabited by Germans."

"Everybody else *get out*, eh?" Lansing muttered.

"The beer should be on my truck by now," Bohler said. "I must see to the rest of the supplies for my base. Nice talking to you, Major."

Bohler clicked his heels together and bowed, then turned and marched from the tavern.

Lansing shook his head. *There are all kinds of creepy things crawling around here*, he thought.

OSATO KEN WAS WAITING by the iron gate as Lansing returned to Zeitler House. Emerging from his small white Volkswagen, the Major and the Japanese exchanged introductions. Tall for an Oriental, Osato as a stern faced man with jet black hair combed back from a high forehead.

"The police told me you'd meet me here," he said in fluent German. "How may I assist you, Major?"

"I'd like to see Zeitler House," Lansing replied.

"Very well," Osato agreed as he unlocked the barred gate.

The building was slightly smaller than a mansion, but larger than most houses. It was almost as menacing in the afternoon sunlight as it had been draped by swirling fog and darkness. Drab and gray, the structure appeared to be the product of a macabre architect and a team of brooding carpenters.

"I was rather surprised to discover a Japanese in a small German town, Osato-san," Lansing remarked.

"My father was a diplomat here before the war. I became quite familiar with Germany as a child," Osato explained. "I later worked for a company in Tokyo that specializes in selling art objects on the international market. They sent me here to buy the works of Anton Zeitler."

"Anton Zeitler? The former owner of the house?"

"Anton was a very talented sculptor. He was brilliant at expressing himself in stone and marble."

"Did he make that statue of *The Grim Reaper*?" Lansing asked, tilting his head toward the silent gray sentinel on the lawn.

Osato nodded. "It was the last thing Anton created. His finest work and the most horrible. He paid for creating that stone monster. Some say he sold his

soul to the Devil he worshipped in exchange for his artistic genius. Perhaps he retained his soul, but his sanity was certainly lost."

"Zeitler was a Satanist?" Lansing was barely able to believe his ears. The case was getting more bizarre by the second.

"He was," Osato replied. "But Lucifer may not have his spirit as it is still Earthbound."

"In the tavern I was told a ghost killed the man we found in the forest. Do you agree with that theory?"

"I don't know if Anton's spirit would kill anyone," Osato said. "But I've been the owner of Zeitler House since Anton's death six months ago. I know what I've heard. I recognized his voice crying in the night, calling to the Devil for help and cursing mankind for reasons only a madman could understand. I've seen his handwriting on walls and mirrors. I've felt the unnatural cold and the presence of evil. This house is haunted."

"Is that why you don't live here?"

Osato nodded grimly. "I hope to sell the house before I return to Japan. The property is worth a great deal of money. But I wouldn't set foot in this house after dark. It could be *dangerous*."

"How did you become the owner of this place?" Lansing inquired as they mounted the front steps of Zeitler House.

"Anton was a recluse. He seldom left his home, and he never really associated with the villagers. Anton had no family and no friends. I suppose he knew me as well as he did anyone. Still, I was quite surprised to learn he left his property to me in his will."

Osato opened the door and they entered. Lansing almost expected to see an Iron Maiden in every corner, a rack in the living room, occult symbols drawn on the floors and Satanic paintings covering the walls. However, the house was literally empty. All furniture and personal belongings of the late sculptor had been sold at public auctions or destroyed. The sinks, bathtub and toilet were still intact, but the Japanese explained that the water, as well as the electricity and gas, had been shut off.

"How did Zeitler die?" Lansing asked as they traveled from bare room to bare room.

"He hanged himself." Osato pointed to the stairwell they had just descended, "Anton tied one end of a rope to the railing upstairs, the other end to his neck, and jumped. He must have broken his neck instantly."

Only one door in Zeitler House was locked.

"It leads to the basement," Osato explained, "I do not have the key. I don't know what happened to it."

"Why don't you have the door

removed?"

"I will, after this house has been exorcised," Osato replied seriously. "You see, Anton conducted his unholy rituals down there. I am not eager to open the door to Satan's altar."

As they walked from the house, the Japanese noticed Lansing's expression. "You appear skeptical, Major," he remarked.

"Ghoulies and ghosties are somewhat out of my line," the American replied dryly.

"Perhaps if you look at *The Grim Reaper* more closely, see the details and the life in Anton's last work of art, you may begin to understand."

Moving across the lawn, they approached the ghastly statue. Osato had not exaggerated. The closer Lansing got, the more the Reaper resembled an actual being, a terrible denizen from the depths of Hell. The skull-face seemed to be bone painted gray, its teeth and nasal cavity too delicately designed to be stone. The eyesockets were so deep Lansing couldn't see where they ended. Even the shaft of the scythe reminded him of petrified wood.

"What's this?" he asked, noticing a dark brown stain on the 'blade' of the scythe.

"Perhaps it is discolored by exposure to weather," Osato suggested.

"Yeah." Lansing nodded, but he thought the stain resembled

dried blood.

LANSING DROVE to Dyer Barracks that afternoon. He was vaguely familiar with the base as he'd investigated the murder of a German National discovered in the basement of Dyer's NCO club in 1979. Thanks to the unimaginative uniformed construction of Military installations, Lansing had little trouble finding Alpha Battery. Explaining to Captain Brenski, who he was and why he was there, Lansing was told by the battery commander the location of the late PFC Jasper Early's quarters.

USAEUR enlisted personnel are usually assigned to a room large enough for two men to live comfortably. Unfortunately, four men are generally put in each. Lansing knocked on the door to PFC Early's room before entering. He stepped into a typical EM's lodging, consisting of four bunks, four wall lockers, a VOLAR desk and miscellaneous items. A young black soldier, in the process of changing clothes, came stiffly to attention.

"As you were," Lansing said, "What's your name, trooper?"

"Spec Four Holmes, sir," the EM replied.

"I'm Lansing, CID. I assume you know about PFC Early?"

"Yes, sir. They told us his body was found this morning."

"Actually his body was found in a tiny town called Einhornrdorf. As his roommate and a co-worker in Early's section, do you have any idea why Early would be in an obscure Bavarian village in the middle of the night?"

"I think so," Holmes nodded. "Er, do you know anything about the supernatural, sir?"

"Until recently, I thought *The Amityville Horror* was about a street walker," Lansing admitted.

Holmes grinned. "Well, PFC Early believed in the supernatural. He planned to use the GI bill to go to some university in California to study to become a parapsychologist, a guy that investigates psychic phenomenon, E.S.P., haunted houses, astral projection, stuff like that. We used to call him Jasper the Ghost."

"So he was investigating Zeitler House?"

"That's what I'd guess, sir. He used to talk about that place, that's where I'd heard Einhornrdorf mentioned before. Jasper said Zeitler House was the most famous haunted house in the area. He used to go to funeral houses and graveyards, hoping to find some sort of psychic vibrations. Zeitler House would have been just his cup of tea."

"Everybody needs a hobby," Lansing shrugged. "Do you know if Early had any enemies?"

"Oh, no. Not really."

"Does that mean 'maybe'?"

"Well, there is this guy, Spec.

Four Graham. He works in Commo. Graham always said Jasper was messing around with things that ought to be left alone. He said psychic phenomemon is the Devil's mischief and Early was playing right into Satan's hands."

"How did Early take this criticism?"

"He just shrugged it off. Jasper said some people are just determined to make a virtue of ignorance." Holmes frowned. "I remember Graham said something behind Jasper's back that sort of made me shiver. It was a Biblical passage: *Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.*"

SPECIALIST FOURTH CLASS

George P. Graham was a big, bearlike man with close-cropped hair and rosey, dimpled cheeks. He was sitting on his bunk reading a King James Bible as Major Lansing entered his room. The two other enlisted men rose to attention. Graham staggered awkwardly to his feet.

"No need for that," Lansing assured them. "As you were. I'd like to speak to Specialist Graham privately, gentlemen."

The other EM's left the room. Graham dropped heavily onto his bunk and stared up at the CID investigator through watery eyes.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked slowly, his speech slightly slurred.

"I want to talk to you about

PFC Early, Specialist."

"That pagan!" Graham snorted. "I heard what happened to him. The Lord deals harshly with them that have truck with the occult. *Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord!*"

"You're saying Early was struck down by The Hand of God?"

Graham nodded. "The Holy Bible will only tolerate so much abuse from us mortals. Of course, Early may have tried to summon up a demon in one of his unholy rituals and he lost control of the hell-thing. It wouldn't be the first time the Devil claimed one of his own through violence."

"Right now, Specialist," Lansing said, "I'm assuming the killer was neither Divine nor Demonic. Who, in this world, might want to kill Early?"

"Maybe he fell out of favor with fellow members of his coven. Practitioners of witchcraft meet in a coven of thirteen. A mockery of Jesus and the Disciples. Perhaps they killed him for some reason. Who knows what goes on inside the mind of a heretic?"

"Beats me," Lansing admitted. "I get the impression you didn't like Early very much."

"He was an agent of Lucifer. Early went to graveyards to perform acts of necromancy. Just as Eve ate the Forbidden Fruit of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, Early read books dealing with the forbidden knowledge of the occult. He was probably in

Einhorndorf to try to communicate with the spirit of that damnable wizard Zeitler to learn more evil secrets."

"You knew he was going to Zeitler House?" Lansing asked, raising an eyebrow.

"I kept a close watch on his activities," Graham admitted. "I heard him tell a taxi driver by the front gate to take him to Einhorndorf. What other reason would a black magic sinner like Early have for going to that speck-of-nothin' town?"

"Where—were you last night, Specialist?"

"I was in Nuremburg spreading The Word to passersby," he reached under his bunk and produced a shoe box full of brochures. "A godless people, these Germans. They are in dire need of Salvation."

Graham gave Lansing a pamphlet. "I hope the people you gave these to can read English," the Major mused as he scanned over the brochure before slipping it into his jacket pocket. "I take it you regard yourself as a servant of God."

"I don't 'regard' myself as such, *I am!*" Graham declared. "The Lord speaks to me and I carry out His will. Whatever I'm told to do, I do it!"

"Anything?"

"*Anything.*"

"Interesting," Lansing remarked as he turned toward the door. "Keep studying the Bible."

Maybe you'll find the part about *Love thy neighbor.*"

MAJOR CONGLOSE, a short, round-faced man with a steadily receding hairline, paced angrily in Major Lansing's office at CID headquarters. Conglose hoped to replace Colonel Harris as General Clayton's executive officer. Although Harris' transfer had yet to materialize, Conglose was determined to make a good impression to insure his future promotion. Unfortunately, Conglose's ambition often caused him to meddle in Lansing's homicide investigations.

"An officer in The United States Army turned ghost hunter," Conglose snorted. "What nonsense!"

Lansing closed a leather bound textbook, *A History of Haunted Houses*, and sighed, "I thought you had your hands full investigating the increase of illegal heroin in the Bavarian area."

"I know narcotics investigation is my department, Lansing," Conglose admitted. "But you aren't going to solve this homicide by trying to arrest a goddamn ghost."

"Major, I didn't say the killer was a ghost," Lansing replied flatly. "There is, however, evidence to suggest this so-called phantom killed Early. At least, that's what someone *wants* us to believe."

"Then the killer must be the Japanese."

"Any idea what motive he might have?" Lansing asked dryly.

"He wants to keep people away from that house, of course," Conglose answered. "Maybe Zeitler had a fortune hidden in there, and Osato is scaring the superstitious locals away with this haunted house crap so he can search for it."

"The people of Einhorndorf always avoided the place, even when Zeitler was still alive. Why would he conjure up a ghost story? Besides, he *owns* the house and everything in it."

"Then it's the religious crackpot," Conglose said. "He sounds like he's been reading The Bible too much and fancies himself to be some sort of Avenging Angel."

"I'd say Graham's problem is the result of what he drinks, not what he reads," Lansing commented.

"An alcoholic fanatic is even worse," Conglose said. "Graham could have followed Early to Zeitler House. Maybe he thought he was obeying 'The Will of God' by killing someone he considered to be a witch or a warlock or whatever it's called," Major Conglose said. "Look at his two-o-file! Graham has been arrested twice by the MP's and once by the Nuremburg Police for disorderly conduct while intoxicated. Two of these incidents involved violence!

Graham was busted down to E-three last year for beating up a fellow EM after a heated argument about religion."

"I've read Graham's personal record," Lansing assured him.

"Then you know that before enlisting in 1977, Graham worked as a stevedore in Baton Rouge. Stevedores use a big steel hook. A hook similiar to the instrument used to rip out PFC Early's throat."

"Well, there isn't very much longshoreman equipment available in Southern Germany."

"There are plenty of farms around here," Conglose replied.

"Graham could have gotten one of those hooks they use to move bales of hay. It would have served as the murder weapon."

Lansing nodded. "But how did he kill Early in the middle of a lake of mud without leaving any footprints?"

"I've been thinking about that," Conglose smiled. "Graham could have knocked Early unconscious, *carried* him into the mud and killed him there. Then he retraced his steps *backwards* out of the mud."

Lansing shook his head. "The footprints aren't deep enough to suggest a man carrying a heavy burden made them."

"Damn it, Lansing!" Conglose snapped. "What's your theory? Do you think that damn statue came to life and murdered Early?"

"I don't work on theories,

Major, I deal with facts." Lansing sighed. "But the stone blade of the Reaper's scythe did appear to be stained with blood."

Conglose was about to speak as Specialist Fifth Class Wendy Davis entered the office. An attractive young WAC, Wendy was Lansing's personal secretary. A large brown purse and a pile of folders filled her arms until Lansing relieved her of the latter.

"You must have been successful," he said. "This stuff feels heavy enough."

"The people at the immigration department had all the information about Osato Ken ready and waiting for me, sir," she explained. "I'm glad you called them and arranged everything. Nobody there spoke English."

"I thought you didn't consider Osato a suspect," Conglose growled.

"Everyone is a suspect," Lansing replied. "How did it go at the BND?" he asked Wendy.

"Fine," she smiled. "They seemed to be delighted to assist the U.S. Army by supplying information about Bohler and the *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders*."

"What the devil is the BND?" Conglose demanded.

"*Bundesnachrichtendienst*," Lansing explained as he sorted through the files. "The West German Federal Intelligence Agency. They keep a close watch on extremist groups such as

Deutschland fur Deutschlanders."

"Just because you encountered some of those neo-Nazi crackpots in Einhornsdorf doesn't mean they're involved in early's murder." Conglose snorted.

"No, but they were purchasing 'supplies.' One generally buys one's goods from a place near one's home," Lansing stated, unrolling a long map of Bavaria, "Or one's camp."

Placing the map on his desk, Lansing pointed to an area circled by red ink and labeled "D.D." "See! The BND marked the *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders* headquarters. It's only a quarter of a kilometer from Einhornsdorf."

"What reason would Bohler or his followers have for killing Early? Just because he was an American?"

"Early was dressed in civilian clothes, so they might not have known he was an American," Lansing replied, skimming over Osato's file from immigration.

Osato Ken had been born in Kyoto, Japan in 1935. He lived with his father, Osato Mifume, at the Japanese Embassy in Berlin until the family returned to *Nippon* in 1943. Following Mifume's death, Osato Ken was adopted by his Uncle Goro. He attended a university in Tokyo, majoring in business management and minoring in chemistry and art. Following graduation, he joined the firm of Geijutsu International and soon became a

junior executive in the company's trade in valuable art. He was chosen to evaluate and purchase material from artists throughout Germany and Austria. The file recorded Osato's current address, his inheritance of Zeitler House and the fact that it was up or sale.

"Do you think Early may have seen the *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders* doing something at Zeitler House? Something they were willing to kill to keep secret?" Conglose asked.

"Perhaps," Lansing mused as he stared down at the map. "I wonder if Colonel Bohler serves beer or tea to visitors?"

SURROUNDED BY A TALL brick wall with barbed wire laced along the top and two uniformed guards at the gate, the camp of *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders* resembled the set of a World War II P.O.W. Camp movie. However, the sentries were not actors and their Mauser rifles weren't props.

The guards glared at Lansing as he stood by his white Volkswagen parked in front of the gate. The CID investigator didn't have to wait long. Colonel Bohler, dressed in his black uniform and packing a pistol on his hip, approached the sentries and told them to let Lansing enter.

"Good morning, Major," Bohler greeted, white teeth dividing his beard. "Did you come to continue yesterday's conversa-

tion about *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders*?"

"Partly," Lansing replied, stepping across the threshold. "I'd also like to see your camp. I understand you have nearly twenty square kilometers of property. I'm curious as to how you use it."

"So you've done a bit of research about us, eh?" Bohler remarked, "Why is the American Army interested in my organization?"

"An American serviceman was killed in Einhorndorf. I'm investigating the case."

"Why would you suspect us of having anything to do with his death?" Bohler asked, raising a bushy eyebrow. "We're a political activist group, and I admit we don't want The United States military in Germany, but we've never resorted to terrorist tactics like those damnable Marxists."

"I'm merely questioning everyone in the vicinity," Lansing assured him. "Tell me, what do your people do here?"

"What does any army base do, Major?" Bohler smiled thinly, "We prepare for war."

They walked toward a stone house, even larger than Zeitler's dwelling. Lansing noticed the windows were barred and equipped with thick metal shutters. At the top of a flagpole, the circled "X" symbol of *Deutschlander fur Deutschlanders* decorated a yellow banner flapping

in the breeze. On the lawn, nine young men in undershirts and shorts exercised to the cadence call of an instructor.

"How many members belong to *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders*?" Lansing inquired as they reached the front steps.

"Our number increases every week," Bohler bragged. "As more and more Germans grow disillusioned with your American brand of Democracy and the Soviet-oriented Communism that play tug of war with our country. *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders* will emerge as the only sane choice for the struggling masses."

"The United States is a constitutional Republic, not a Democracy," Lansing corrected. "But you were talking about war earlier. War with whom? The Reds, the Yankees, or the current German government?"

"Any of them. Perhaps all three." Bohler shrugged. "Personally I suspect we'll have to fight the Communists in the end. Your country has been backing down everytime a Marxist nation or even a Third World despotism like Iran whispers 'boo!' The United States as a world power can't last much longer."

"We might surprise you," Lansing commented dryly as he followed the Colonel into the building.

They entered a long corridor. Photos and paintings of Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, Martin

Bormann and Colonel Bohler all but covered the walls. Lansing noticed a Nazi flag, banned by the Federal Republic of Germany, mounted opposite the *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders* banner, but he didn't mention it.

"Here is our gymnasium," Bohler announced, pulling open a large door. "Fitness is necessary for any army."

A young woman in a sweatsuit swung nimbly on a set of parallel bars and a husky man raised a heavy barbell overhead repeatedly. Two men on a red mat practiced *jujitsu* techniques. One hurled the other over his hip and stamped his foot near the fallen man's head.

"As you can see, our training, unlike *your* army, is not lax," Bohler said with a sly grin.

If wars were won by arrogance, you'd be a sure winner, you bastard! Lansing thought, but he said, "What sort of weapons do your people train with, Colonel?"

Bohler's smile widened. "I'll show you."

The leader of *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders* led Lansing down a flight of stairs to the basement. It had been converted into an indoor firing range. Several guns racks contained dozens of rifles and pump shotguns.

"All firearms are legally owned and registered with the federal government," Bohler explained. "Don't bother to tell the BND about the guns. They already

know about our arsenal."

"You must plan to let your opponents get pretty close," Lansing observed, noticing the shooting range was only ten meters long. The targets were plaster mannequins dressed in West German, Russian and American military uniforms.

"This is only the pistol range," Bohler told him, removing two sets of earmuff-style devices from a peg on the wall. "The rifle range is outside."

He slipped a pair of ear protectors over his head and handed the other set to Lansing. The Major donned the device as Bohler drew his pistol, a Walther P-38, from his holster.

"We'll shoot Russians today," the Colonel remarked, chambering a round into his weapon.

Approaching one of the ranges, he aimed the pistol at a mannequin and fired four bullets into the target's chest and midsection. Two nine-millimeters drilled through the red disc tacked to the tunic to indicate the dummy's heart.

"I demand excellence from myself as well as my men," Bohler declared proudly. "Care to try, Major?" He offered the P-38 to Lansing.

"Accepting the pistol, the CID investigator moved to another "Russian," raised the Walther and fired. A nine-millimeter punched the center of the mannequin's disc. Elevating the

barrel, squeezing the trigger with the tip of his finger, Lansing popped a bullet into each of the dummy's eyes. He put the last round squarely between the freshly dotted orbs. Bohler stared at the plaster-leaking hole in the target's forehead with disbelief.

"I do much better with a gun I'm familiar with," Lansing said, handing the P-38 butt first to Bohler. "Do your people use less conventional weapons? Throwing knives, hatchets, sickles?"

"A little bayonet practice," the Colonel replied, trying to conceal the annoyance Lansing's marksmanship created. "This is the 20th century, Major."

"Of course," Lansing nodded. "I suppose your men train after dark?"

"Night maneuvers are part of any guerrilla war."

"Guerilla war? Is that what your men are being groomed for?"

"Naturally," Bohler said. "One day the Communists and the Imperialists will clash. The victor will be too stunned and off guard to prevent my army from seizing control. The people will welcome a strong government of law and order. *Deutschland fur Deutsch-landers* will offer an isolationist foreign policy and an economically stable domestic one. Germany will beg us to lead her!"

"And tomorrow the world," Lansing muttered. "Thanks for the tour, Colonel."

SP5 WENDY DAVIS raised her pretty head as Lansing entered the office. A lab report form attached to a clip board in the Major's hand told Wendy why Lansing's expression was grim.

"Is that the analysis of the stain from the Reaper's scythe? she asked.

"Yeah," he nodded. "It's human blood. Type O-positive. Same as PFC Early's."

She moved her swivel chair and swung her long legs from under the desk. Lansing noticed her skirt had ridden a good four inches above the knee (and a very good four inches at that, in Lansing's opinion). If he was ten years younger and she was an officer . . . yeah, if!

"Sir, I've been thinking," Wendy began. "From what you discovered at Bohler's camp, it sounds as if *Deutschland fur Deutschlanders* wants a war between the West German government, the U.S. Army and the Commies. Maybe they're trying to *instigate* the conflict, the way the Manson family tried to start a racial war in the United States."

"That's possible," Lansing agreed. "Some of their members may have encountered Early during a night maneuver and, perhaps mistaking him for a German National, killed him for some sort of political or propaganda purposes. But how'd they manage to tear out his throat without

stepping in the mud?"

"Bohler may have lied to you about the weapons his group uses, sir. If one of their tools of destruction was a South American *bola*. A *bola* with steel wire instead of cord. If such a weapon was thrown at Early and caught him around the neck, that would explain his slashed throat and the lack of footprints."

"Early's throat was *torn* open, not slashed," Lansing said. "A *bola* has two or more weighted balls that would have clubbed Early's skull on contact. No cranial injuries were reported in the autopsy. Besides, the killer would still have to walk into the mud to retrieve the *bola*."

"I guess it wasn't such a good hunch," she frowned.

"Better than the one I was toying with," he admitted. "I considered a metal boomerang with a sharpened edge as a possible murder weapon. However, a boomerang seldom returns to the thrower unless it misses the target."

"What about a scythe!" Wendy exclaimed, "Not the one the Reaper statue has, of course, but a *real* scythe."

"The shaft of a scythe is about four or five feet long. Even if the killer had exceptionally long arms, I don't see how he could have struck down Early from ten feet away."

"Can a hawk be trained to attack a human being, sir?"

Wendy asked. She wasn't kidding.

"We didn't find any feathers," Lansing replied as he poured himself a cup of coffee.

The door opened and Major Conglose entered. He smiled smugly as he said, "You can relax, Lansing. I've just solved your case!"

"Oh?" Lansing's brow raised, "You know who killed PFC Early?"

"That's right," Conglose announced. "This time I've succeeded where you've failed. I wonder who General Clayton will call 'the best homicide investigator in USAEUR' now?"

Lansing sipped his coffee. "Well, don't leave us in suspense, Major."

"The murderer is . . ." Conglose enjoyed a dramatic pause. "Anton Zeitler!"

Wendy gasped. Lansing stared down at his cup for a moment before saying, "Did you check with the special equipment department? Do we have any handcuffs suitable for arresting ghosts or will we use the old 'bell, book and candle' stuff?"

"Zeitler is no ghost!" Conglose stated. "He isn't even dead! I just returned from Einhornrdorf. I met the doctor who signed Zeitler's death certificate. He told me no autopsy was ever conducted. The kraut sawbones admits he didn't really even examine the body. I thought a superstitious bunch of Bavarian

hillbillies would be afraid to touch the 'corpse' of an infamous devil-worshipper like Zeitler."

"But Anton Zeitler committed suicide," Wendy remarked.

Conglose glared at her. Such an outburst from a mere spec. five was downright disrespectful! "Zeitler hanged himself, but he didn't die. Several cases of men surviving the gallows have been recorded."

"How many have survived the embalming table?" Lansing asked dryly, "Modern morticians eviscerate their customers, drain out the blood and other liquids, then pump their veins full of embalming fluid."

"How do we know Zeitler was embalmed?" Conglose replied. "The good people of Einhornrdorf may have buried him *alive*!"

"How'd he get out of the coffin with six feet of dirt on the lid?" Lansing inquired. "I could never figure out how vampires manage that trick, let along a living man with a broken neck."

Conglose snorted, "Maybe Zeitler wasn't buried in a coffin. Perhaps they wrapped him in a blanket and buried him. Or he might have been placed in a mausoleum above ground."

"Assuming you're correct," Lansing began, "why did Zeitler kill Early?"

"He's insane," Conglose said. "He was crazy before he hanged himself and he's probably even crazier after waking up in a

grave or a tomb. Osato said he heard Zeitler's voice, saw his handwriting and all that stuff. Anton Zeitler must be living in the basement of that house, behind the only door that Osato doesn't have a key for. The crazy bastard may actually believe he is dead! He may literally think he's a ghost! Maybe that's why he killed Early. Because he thought that's what a spook should do."

"An interesting theory, Major," Lansing remarked thoughtfully.

"A theory I can prove after I get permission to exhume Zeitler's body. If, indeed, there is a body to exhume." Conglose moved to the door. Glancing back at Lansing, he added, "I hope you don't take this too hard, Lansing. Nobody wins all the time."

"Life is tough, sir," Lansing said.

As Conglose left the office and closed the door, Wendy turned to her boss and said, "Do you think he's right, sir?"

"I don't know," Lansing admitted. "Perhaps Major Conglose regards this investigation as a contest, but I don't. *Who* finds the killer isn't important. However, the Major won't be able to exhume Zeitler's body overnight." He slipped on his service cap, "I'm going to see Doyle about borrowing some lock picks."

"You're going to Zeitler House?" she asked, obvious

concern creeping into her voice.

"Major Conglose goes by the book, but I bend a rule or two from time to time." Lansing grinned. "I think it's time to bend one now. While Major Conglose tries to get a grave digger's permit, I'm going to check out the basement."

"What if Conglose is right, sir?"

"Then," Lansing replied grimly, "a mad man is hiding in Zeitler House."

PICKING THE LOCK to the gate wasn't difficult for an advanced student of breaking and entering techniques like Major Clifford Lansing. Iron creaked as he opened the barred gate and entered the sinister property of the late Anton Zeitler. A dense gray fog drifted across the area, draping the dark mansion with an eerie mist. Lansing unzipped his field jacket and drew out a .45 caliber 1911 automatic. Working the slide, he heard the first shell shift from the magazine to snap snugly into the breech of the big pistol. Thumbing on the safety, Lansing returned the Colt automatic to the GI shoulder holster under his jacket. He took a deep breath, tried to ignore the knots in his stomach and began to approach Zeitler House.

Lansing advanced slowly, employing trees, bushes and the fog itself to conceal his movement. The damp, ankle-high grass

seemed to clutch at his pants leg like aggressive seaweed. His skin shivered as the clammy mist touched his exposed face and hands. A disturbing sensation of unseen eyes observing his progress added to Lansing's nervousness. Via the corner of his eye, he saw a tall, dark figure appear on the lawn.

Spinning, the CID investigator pulled the .45 from its holster as he fell to one knee. Holding the gun in a two-handed Weaver Stance, he aimed at the ominous form. Fog crawled past the shape's face to reveal the frozen, grinning skull of *The Grim Reaper*. Rising, Lansing holstered the Colt and continued toward the house. For some reason, he didn't feel a bit silly about drawing a gun on a statue.

At last, Lansing reached the mansion. Mounting the stairs quickly but quietly, he moved to the front door and produced a small leather pouch containing the lock picks. However, as he touched the knob he found it turned easily and the door opened into the shadows within the house. Lansing entered, his heart throbbing as he closed the door and switched on a small penlight.

Guided by the thin beam of light, the Major cat-footed his way through the empty hallway. Zeitler House was still as dismal and bare as before, but the almost total darkness surrounding Lansing increased his apprehen-

sion as he moved from one silent, pitch black room to another until he approached the basement. He was startled by what he saw.

The cellar door was standing wide open, and pale yellow light shone up from the basement!

Turning off the penlight, Lansing fought to control his breath as he moved forward, his right hand poised near the gap of his open jacket, ready to dive for the holstered pistol. He reached the open doorway and stared down into the infamous basement. A narrow flight of wooden stairs with a single railing and a patch of a cement floor was all the Major saw. Suddenly, he heard a strange whirling sound. Lansing turned slightly and a long, curved blade slammed into the door scant inches from his face!

Startled, he jerked backward, lost his footing and toppled backward down the stairs. Desperately, he clawed at the railing, caught it and broke his fall half way down the rough wooden stairs. Leaning heavily on the rail, Lansing drew the gun. The door slammed shut hard. Snapping up the Colt, he fired two rounds into the door, the big .45 slugs punching into the wood like an icepick through cardboard.

Ignoring numerous bruises and sores, Lansing held the gun ready as he climbed the stairs. Reaching the door, he turned the knob and thrust it open forcibly. The muzzle of the pistol swung from right to

left, but there was no one there. Cautiously, Lansing stepped from the head of the stairs.

Where is the son of a bitch?

The door was flush against the wall, so the killer wasn't hiding behind it. He had to be lurking in the shadows — somewhere. Lansing moved away from the door. The light from the basement outlined his body, offering the assassin a clear target. As he extracted the penlight from his pocket, Lansing heard something cutting through the air. He barely saw the black sickle-blade whistling toward him in time to avoid it.

Dodging to the left, Lansing raised his Colt even as the blade swung harmlessly by. To his absolute horror, the Major felt a strong cord-like object snake around his wrist as if a steel tentacle had seized him. A powerful tug nearly pulled him off balance as his hand popped open and dropped the pistol.

In the faint light, Lansing saw what had happened. A long length of chain was wound around his wrist. A large sickle with a wicked blade dangled at the end of the chain. Lansing knew what was at the other end. A murderer and a...

The sinister whirl of another object warned Lansing in time to duck below the baseball-size iron sphere attached to the chain. An outline of a man, dressed in black, his face concealed by the darkness, appeared from the

shadows. The killer held the chain, pulled the sickle end taut as he spun the ball-weighted end overhead for another attack.

Seizing the chain trapping his wrist with both hands, Lansing pulled hard. The killer's body jerked forward, but he kept his balance and tugged in retaliation. Lansing didn't resist. He launched himself into his started opponent. Before the killer could swing the ball-weighted portion of his weapon, the Major struck, throwing a powerful sidekick to the shadowy figure's midsection. Moaning, the killer doubled over slightly and Lansing slapped the flat of the sickle blade against the assassin's skull.

Lansing easily disarmed the dazed killer, tossing the chain-sickle-ball weapon aside. "Boo, Osato *san!*" he hissed as he left the stunned Japanese kneeling on the floor and retrieved his pistol.

MAJOR CONGLOSE and SP5 Wendy Davis stared down at the odd-looking weapon curled on Lansing's desk. Raising the sickle portion, Major Lansing explained, "The weapon is called a *Kusarigami*. It is used by the Samurai in Japan to attack opponents on horseback or sentries on wall towers. The *ninja* feudal age espionage agents skilled in numerous martial arts, also employed the *kusarigami* as both a weapon and a wall-scaling tool."

"Osato killed PFC Early with that thing?" Conglose asked, pouting slightly as he felt Lansing had once again robbed him of his moment of glory.

Lansing nodded. "The *kusarigami* is twelve feet long. Tearing out Early's throat from a ten foot distance wasn't any problem for an expert in *kusarigami-jutsu* like Osato Ken."

"That explains how Early was killed," Wendy commented. "But why did Osato do it?"

"The answer to that question is locked up in the lab," Lansing replied. "We confiscated seven kilos of heroin, some of it cut and some of it pure from the basement of Zeitler House."

"Damn!" Conglose exclaimed, "Osato was a stinking pusher! That's where the increase of hard drugs in Bavaria came from!"

"Osato wasn't just a pusher," Lansing said. "Do you remember his file? Osato studied chemistry in Tokyo. Of course, the record didn't mention that he used his knowledge to process raw heroin to be sold on the street. I suspect we'll find that Osato's Uncle Goro is a *yakuza*, a member of organized crime in Japan. Osato was probably sent to Germany by the *Yakuza* to try to establish a dope trade in Europe."

"Encountering a recluse like Zeitler, living in a backward little village populated by superstitious residents, was a godsend for Osato. Perhaps Zeitler really was

a Satanist who left his home to a Japanese art dealer he considered a friend. Perhaps Osato held Zeitler prisoner, forced him to alter his will and hanged him. The truth may come out in the trial. Osato certainly encouraged the haunted house myth which served to keep the locals away from Zeitler House and his heroin lab in the basement.

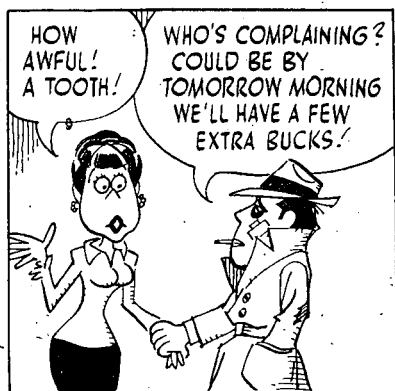
"However, Osato didn't know his 'haunted house' would attract a would-be ghost chaser like PFC Early. Early must have encountered Osato in the house, fled and met his end in the forest. Osato smeared the blood on the Reaper's Scythe, planning to add to the 'legend of Zeitler House,' but he overplayed his hand. Colonel Bohler and his flunkies wouldn't have any reason to encourage local ghost stories (if indeed they even knew about the stories). Graham might have used the killer statue trick, but the only reason he'd have to kill Early would be misguided religious zeal. Any man that kills in a drunken rage wouldn't be clever enough to avoid leaving footprints in a pool of mud."

"So you've got the killer again," Conglose muttered sourly, "and you busted a dope ring to boot." He glared at Lansing. "Narcotics is *my* department, you know!"

"I hope you won't take it too hard," Lansing replied. "Nobody wins all the time." ●

Mike Shamus

by FRED FREDERICKS



The Traveling Man

by EDWARD D. HOCH

He was a traveling man, always ready to move on, just a step ahead of the knock on the door. But now he was here, in this particular city, and he had a deadly business to attend to!

IT WAS A GOOD CITY for his purpose.

He knew it the moment he stepped from the plane and glanced around the crowded airport at the mixture of faces — young and old, light and dark. He knew it when he saw the middle-aged woman push ahead of the long-haired youth in the ticket

line, not with any malice, but rather with that sense of justice he'd seen so many times before. Yes, this would be the city for him.

He took a cab downtown, past great muddy holes where tomorrow's buildings were rising, through crowded streets lined with department stores and ramp garages and glass-fronted banks,

and finally to the second-best hotel the city had to offer. He always stayed at the second-best where he could be reasonably comfortable without causing too much speculation.

The room, when he reached it, bathed him in a certain quiet coolness that was refreshing. He unpacked quickly, by habit leaving much in his suitcase. He was a traveling man and he was always ready to move on, just a step ahead of the knock on the door. The hour was still early, just after noon, which would give him time to look around before evening. There was the necessity of finding a girl, and once out west this had taken him two full days. It was easy in college towns, where an undercurrent of friction always existed, but here he just didn't know.

He rented a car down the street, using the name of Salmon, and drove north toward the lake. The buses he passed on the way were crowded, mostly with kids celebrating the beginning of summer vacation. He noted a number of long-haired, bearded youths along the street, and that was good.

The beach, when he reached it, was a thin, endless strip of sand that seemed to run for miles in either direction — a curving arc of white waiting only to receive the waters. He stood on the boardwalk for a time, watching the mingling of faces, the carefree

splashing in the surf. Then he strolled on down the beach, to an amusement park where a shabby, paint-faded ferris wheel turned slowly, as if in the breeze. Things were a bit noisier here, and it might be a better place to find the girl. As he watched, he saw a long-haired youth argue with a beach guard, and when the boy turned away he followed.

"Do you have the time?" he asked the youth when he'd caught up with him.

The boy turned, expecting trouble, and ran a hand through his long dark hair. "It's around four o'clock, I guess. I don't have a watch."

"That guard was giving you some trouble."

The youth shrugged. "The damn lake's so polluted pretty soon nobody'll be swimming in it anyway."

They'd strolled over behind a refreshment stand, out of sight for a moment. "Want a cigarette?" he asked the youth, holding out a wrinkled pack.

"I don't smoke much."

"Everybody smokes this brand."

"What is it — pot?"

He nodded slightly. "The finest Panama red. Try it!"

The youth shook his head. "Too many cops in this park." He started to turn away and Salmon hit him with a sudden judo blow to the neck. The youth gasped and went down hard. Salmon bent over

and stuffed the package of cigarettes into his shirt pocket, then straightened up and began shouting for help.

In a moment a small crowd had collected behind the refreshment stand, and the beach guard was forcing his way through. "What happened here?" he asked.

"This punk-kid tried to mug me! Isn't the beach even safe for honest people any more?"

The guard looked down at the long-haired youth. "I had some trouble with him just a few minutes ago! Looks like you took care of him, mister."

"Just a lucky punch."

"I'll call the park patrol." He noticed the cigarettes and bent to examine them. "These look funny. I'll bet they're marihuana. Kids these days..."

"I'll leave him with you, officer."

"Wait, mister! We'll need you to press charges."

"I'm just a visitor in the city, I couldn't stay over long enough to testify."

When the police arrived, he managed to melt into the background and then return to his car. The marihuana possession and the guard's testimony would be enough to put the kid in jail for a while, and that was all he really wanted.

That made one less of them on the streets.

AFTER DINNER HE STARTED

making rounds of the more likely bars, still looking for the girl he needed. He saw one on a street corner outside a restaurant, and followed her two blocks to get a good look at her face, then rejected her. She had pimples, and her legs were too thin.

Near midnight he was beginning to get discouraged. He'd covered the likely-looking bars without finding anyone, and he turned at last to a neoned bowling alley at one end of a deserted shopping center. He watched a couple of middle-aged men bowling casually between beers, and then strolled down to the last alley, where a girl in tight red pants was bowling by herself.

He waited until she'd finished her game, then offered to buy her a beer. After a moment's hesitation she nodded and followed him to the bar.

"What's your name?" she asked over the second one, after they'd exhausted the more likely topics for light banter.

"Salmon."

"Salmon like in fish?"

"Salmon like in pink," he corrected. "I'm no fish." He'd been studying her long slender legs beneath the red pants, deciding that she was the girl he needed.

"No, I guess you're not. You from out of town?"

He nodded. "How about showing me around?"

She thought about it, sipping

her beer. "I usually meet my boy friend here, after he gets off work."

"So you miss him one night."

"All right," she decided.

"What do I call you, just Salmon?"

"Just Salmon."

MUCH LATER, WHEN THEY'D parked down by the lake, he asked, "What do you think about all these long-haired hippies, these kids who are always high on drugs and sleeping with each other?"

"Oh, I don't know, Salmon. I mostly ignore them. They're people."

"But dirty. And immoral."

"So what do you do?" She leaned back on the seat next to him, gazing out at the starscape over the lake. "You can't get away from them these days. You might as well live with it."

She pulled out the ashtray on her side and lit a cigarette with the dashboard lighter. "You're a funny fellow, Salmon. What do you want in this town?"

"What does anyone want? Just a simple life."

"Why did you ask me about the kids? I'm not much older than them myself, you know."

"But you're different. You're the way girls used to be. You never see the other ones in bowling alleys."

She giggled. "Now you're making fun of me!"

"I am not! I'm serious!"

She was silent for a moment. Then she asked, "How long are you going to be in town, Salmon?"

"Oh, a few days. As long as it takes me."

"As long as what takes you?"

"My business. Want to go for a swim tomorrow?"

"I thought you didn't like hippies and long-haired kids. There are always a lot of them at the beach."

"Look," he said, as if suddenly reaching a decision, "can I trust you?"

"I guess so, why?"

"Then listen. We go to the beach tomorrow, just the two of us, and we walk down around where they are, with their guitars and beer cans . . ."

"What's this all about, anyway?"

"I want you to walk around there till one of them tries to pick you up. I'll see that it happens."

She retreated a bit from him. "Look, mister, I hardly know you. What is all this?"

"Do it, and there's a hundred dollars in it for you."

"A hundred . . . Just who in hell are you, anyway?"

He sighed and shifted his gaze back to the dark waters. "Just a guy. A guy with a hundred bucks. Come on, you just told me you don't care about them."

"I said I ignore them. There's a difference." She stubbed out the

cigarette. "Besides, why should I want to cause trouble?"

"The trouble's already there. It's everywhere in this country today. I'm paying you a hundred dollars to help do something about it."

"What are you going to do?" she asked. "I don't want my name all over the papers."

"Don't worry. I'll just start a little fuss and get a few people fighting. No one will even remember what you looked like."

"What are you — a Communist or something?"

"Hardly that. Call me a concerned citizen, if you want."

"You haven't even asked my name."

"Your name isn't important to me. It would be best if we didn't know too much about each other."

"But I *want* to know about you!" she insisted. "I'm not going to take money for this thing without knowing what I'm getting into!"

He thought about that. Finally he said, "I'm a writer, for a news magazine. I need a story — a big story — even if I have to invent one."

"Is that the truth?"

"Do you want the hundred or not?"

She stared straight ahead through the windshield. "All right," she said at last. "Tell me what you want me to do."

daybreak the next morning, and by noon he knew the plan would have to be delayed for a day. That was bad, because the girl might change her mind, but there was nothing he could do. In another city, during the winter, he'd used a downtown movie theatre, but the results had been only partly satisfactory. He wanted a beach, someplace open, where the flames of hate could be quickly fanned.

But now he couldn't let the girl out of his sight. A day spent with her boy friend, -or with a gossiping girl friend, might ruin his entire plan. He found her at the apartment where he'd left her the night before, sitting casually on the bed while she filed her fingernails.

"Nasty day," he said.

"No crowds at the beach, not even hippies."

"We'll wait till tomorrow." He glanced around at the plain, slightly shabby apartment. "Don't you work anywhere?"

"Not right now." She tossed back her long blonde hair. "I was a secretary at a radio station until three weeks ago. I haven't been looking too hard since then — just collecting unemployment insurance."

"Then my hundred must look pretty good to you."

"Sure. I guess so."

"I noticed your name on the bell outside."

She shrugged and went on

THE RAIN STARTED before

filing her nails. "I've got nothing to hide from you. The way I see it, you've got more to lose than I have. If there's trouble, I can just say some guy paid me to do it."

"There won't be any trouble." He tried not to show his annoyance.

"So what's on for today? Do we stand on the corner under an umbrella and count long-hairs going by?"

"You think it's a big joke, don't you?" He wondered if she'd still be joking if he showed her the item in the morning paper, about a youth arrested near the beach for possession of marihuana, and told her how he'd done it.

"What got you like this, Salmon?"

"Like what?"

"The hatred. You really do hate them, don't you?"

He walked to the window and gazed out at the hard June rain, watching occasional men and women as they scurried between doorways, sometimes splashing bravely through puddles that glistened and rippled with the drops. "Skip, it," he said at last. "Forget it! The deal's off for tomorrow."

"If that's the way you want it . . ."

"Oh hell!" He slammed his fist into the wall by the window.

"Go out and cool off, Salmon. Walk in the rain."

She sounded like his mother,

a little half-forgotten woman from his distant past. But perhaps it was a good idea. He left her and went down to the street, staying close to the buildings to avoid the worst of the downpour. It was good weather for thinking.

When had the hatred started? He couldn't even remember its beginning any more, couldn't remember the birth of this gnawing feeling that grew from the pit of his stomach to finally engulf his entire body. His father had died young, and sometimes he thought it was this remembered fear — this fear of death and dying — that had turned him against the young and all they stood for. He'd learned the techniques of violence well, as a policeman on a midwest force following two years in the Army. It was during his police duties, one night in spring, that he'd been called to quell a disturbance near a college campus. He'd waded into the crowd with his nightstick the way he'd been taught, only to lose it to a bearded, bead-wearing youth who humiliated him before the other officers. Later, when the disturbance was quieted, he'd sought out the bearded youth and beat him senseless with the nightstick, fracturing his skull. For that, he'd been quietly dismissed from the force, though no charges were officially brought against him.

After that, he'd sought them out, traveling around the country,

using the techniques of evidence and hand-to-hand combat he'd learned in his job. When possible, he used violence, because there was something satisfying in seeing one of them at his feet; broken and beaten. But sometimes, as on the previous day, he was content to frame them for some crime, to see them taken away to be locked up where they belonged. *Violence is as American as apple pie*, one of them had said, one of the black ones. And maybe that was right. In another life, another time, he might have been fighting Indians, or breaking strikes, or hunting runaway slaves.

Presently the rain let up, and he kept on walking. At one point he stopped in a store and bought some rubber nipples for baby bottles. He would have a use for them the following day.

SUNNY.

Sunny and warm, with the temperature climbing into the eighties. A perfect day for the beach. Already he could see that the lake buses were crowded with young people, and cars of them passed him on the street. He picked up the girl before noon, and they drove to the beach.

He parked a bit away from the other cars in the lot, in the event he needed to make a quick exit, "Change into your bathing suit," he told her. "I'll meet you outside the bathroom." He started to get out his side.

"Salmon?"

"What is it?"

"Where will you go after today, after this is over?"

He shrugged. "Another city. It isn't important where. I'm always traveling."

She took a deep breath. "All right."

"Remember — there's a hundred in it for you."

"I'll be earning it."

He watched her hurry toward the bathhouse, her hips moving beneath the clinging cloth of the slacks. Yes, she would be a good one, even better than the last. He fumbled in his jacket pocket for the revolver, checked to see that it was loaded, and carefully fitted one of the rubber nipples over the barrel.

When the girl appeared and began walking across the sand, he followed at a reasonable distance. He'd kept his pants and jacket on, to conceal the gun, and there was always the possibility that a fully-clothed man would attract attention walking on the beach. But with the amusement park nearby it shouldn't seem too unusual.

In the last city it had been different. He'd chosen a bus terminal at the beginning of spring vacations, and hired a girl who was an obvious tramp. She'd followed one of the long-haired college youths outside, and then started screaming. Salmon had watched while the others — the older ones — grabbed the youth

and beat him with their fists. That night the college kids had retaliated by smashing the windows of the bus station, and a pitched battle had developed in the streets. It was, in all, more than he could have anticipated. After it was over, he'd quietly boarded a bus and left own.

Now it was time again, and he felt the surge of adrenaline within him. The girl appeared, walking across the beach, and he followed. She passed the first group of lounging youths without incident, though a few of them eyed her with open admiration. As he'd instructed her, she headed next for the refreshment stand — not the one where the guard might remember him, but another farther down the boardwalk. At this end of the beach, the long-haired youths and their girls had all but taken over, dancing in the sand to the throbbing beat of rock music from a portable radio.

He settled at last on a tall, lanky youth with flowing blond hair, who wore a peace symbol around his neck. When the girl glanced back at him, he gave her a signal and then watched her move in on the guy. She had to lure him away from the others, up the beach a bit nearer the refreshment stand. Then Salmon would move in, just close enough to fire a single shot. The rubber nipple was not nearly as effective as a real silencer, but he'd found that it reduced the sound of the shot

fairly well, especially outdoors. His only remaining problem was whether to kill the long-haired youth or the girl.

She'd spoken to him and he was going with her now, unnoticed by the others in the group. They headed back toward the refreshment stand, and Salmon moved to intercept them. When she saw him, she went into her act, twisting herself into the young man's arms as if she were fighting him. She screamed, but for a moment the noise passed unnoticed, smothered by the rock music and the sounds of laughter. He moved in, closer than he'd intended, keeping the gun hidden beneath his coat.

She turned, still twisting in the boy's grasp, and something in his face must have warned her. She saw the gun, and tore herself free, terrified now. She was ruining the whole thing, and he knew she had to be the one to die. The gun coughed once as the bullet split the notched end of the rubber nipple, and she twisted grotesquely and went down in the sand. The others were attracted now, the radio dimmed. Then they were all around him suddenly, circling him.

"He killed her," the first youth said. "He killed the girl."

One of them knocked the gun from his hand, sending it spinning to the sand, and the others started to close in. *Yes*, he thought, *this was the way it would be*. They

would kill him too, and then the others would take their vengeance. The good people, the right people. They'd sweep down the beach in a single wave, overwhelming these long-haired perverts, stamping them, crushing them into the sand.

"What are you waiting for?" he shouted at them, looking from face to face as he sought out the one who would finally deliver the fatal blow. "What are you waiting for? Kill me! Kill me! Kill me too!"

He fell to his knees in the sand, head bowed, waiting for the blow to fall. But nothing happened. After a time he rolled over on his back, staring up at the blinding afternoon sun, and his eyes began to water at the glare. The sand was

in his nostrils, in his throat.

Then the circle parted, and he saw the uniformed men coming for him, heard the dull murmur of conversation as one of the officers spread a blanket over the girl. He looked past the young faces, at the others who'd begun to gather now. They were his people, the older ones, the real ones. He wanted to shout out to them, tell them what they had to do.

But they weren't looking any more. As the officers led him away they turned back toward the water, ignoring him, pausing only to talk in low murmurs to the long-haired youths.

They didn't understand. None of them understood. ©

STRANGE, BUT TRUE

In Muncie, Indiana in 1936 a ventriloquist's dummy named Smiley was tried for murder.

"It was an open and shut case," District Attorney Sam Bush told news reporters after the trial. "I mean, we found the little guy beside the body with the gun still in his hand."

The victim was forty-five-year-old Victor Kesselring, a ventriloquist playing the vaudeville circuit, and Smiley was the dummy used in his act.

"Boy, talk about biting the hand that feeds you," District Attorney Bush remarked. "Anyway, we took Smiley down to the station and grilled him, but he dummied up on us, wouldn't say a word. Even during the trial he just sat there like a — well, like a dummy, with that silly grin on his face. The public defender did his best, but of course Smiley didn't have a leg to stand on."

Convicted, Smiley was sentenced to life in prison, where he finally succumbed to dry rot and termites.

ED NOON'S MINUTE MYSTERIES:

"THE BALL PARK MURDER"

by MIKE AVALLONE

It was the fifth inning of a Yankees-Red Sox game with the Red Sox at the long end of a 7-2 score when the guy sitting next to me suddenly doubled up like he had cramps and toppled out of his box seat.

I helped him to a sitting position, but by that time his face had purpled magically and his tongue was twisting in his mouth. I hollered to one of the beer-selling attendants to get a doctor. But while Reggie Jackson was hitting a bases-loaded homer to make the score 7-6 and the attendant was taking too much time to find a sawbones, the guy died. Right under my nose. I went through his pockets for some clue to his identity as the people sitting around us buzzed with comment. I tried to remember something about the

man who had sat next to me for five innings.

He was fat and round like a basketball with a big, bristly mustache that even now in death seemed charged with life. I remembered he'd had a hot dog and several containers of beer because he'd spilled some in my lap. Some cards in his wallet bore the name Carlo Santell and he'd been a rug dealer on Third Avenue since before they tore the El down. A park cop arrived and tried to take over and restore order while I pitched in and helped.

I bent down under the corrugated seats and rounded up the five empty beer containers under Santell's seat. I sniffed at all of them like a bloodhound. I couldn't smell a thing.

I got the cop to find the hot dog

salesman who I recalled: A tall, gangly kid with freckles. But a minute's grilling of the guy cancelled him out. He'd sold far too many red-hots to all the crowd in the vicinity to have effected the solo poisoning of one man.

I forgot I was a baseball fan for the rest of the afternoon and went with the cop and the park doctor as Santell's body was removed to the nearest hospital.

When Captain Monks of Homicide showed up two hours later, the coroner's report was in. Santell had died from arsenic poisoning. The next step was clear. Notify the next of kin.

I went with Monks to a grubby little walk-up in the Village where his widow lived. I got a surprise. Santell had been at least sixty or more. His wife was a small, shapely thing who couldn't have been too long out of high school. She collapsed when Monks broke the news. I went into the bathroom to get some smelling salts to bring her to. Being the kind of guy I am, I explored the medicine cabinet while I was at it. There was the usual toothpaste and shaving cream tubes and cold creams and bottles of smell-water but there was a small tiny brush I couldn't place for a minute. I sniffed it. But it must have been left in alcohol because it smelled like a brewery and otherwise was as clean as a whistle.

There was also a small can of arsenic in the cabinet heavily

labeled POISON in red ink so there was no mistaking it. Lots of people use it to kill rats and there are lots of rats in the Village. I took the can and the tiny brush and the smelling salts back into the living room with me where Monks was having a hard time reviving Santell's wife.

I handed him the smelling salts. "Wake her up, Mike," I told him. "When she comes to, I'm going to hit her with this." I showed him the brush and the arsenic. "It's true she wasn't at the ballpark when he died but she killed Mr. Santell as sure as I'm standing here. And I can tell you just how".

It wasn't hard once I remembered Mr. Santell's capacity for beer and just what kind of a man he was.

THE SOLUTION

Carlos Santell had drunk five containers of beer in five innings of baseball. Also he had a big bristly mustache and mopping the foam from it with the tongue is practically a must with mus-tachioed beer drinkers. The tiny brush was a mustache brush and it was a safe bet that dear little Mrs. Santell dutifully brushed it for him because big, fat men like to be waited on. But the morning of the ball game Mr. Santell hadn't guessed that his dear wife wasn't brushing his mustache, but brushing him out of her life — and out of this world.

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3. Nikki Porter

4. Miss Moneypenny

5. Effie Perine

6. Peggy Fair

7. Lenore "Casey" Case

8. Lacy Brown

9. Miss Miller

10. Lucy Hamilton



A. Sam Spade

B. Ellery Queen

C. Mike Shayne

D. Britt Reid

E. Mike Hammer

F. Mr. District Attorney

G. Perry Mason

H. Joe Mannix

I. M

J. Eddie Capra

Answers:

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BOOK REVIEWS

STIFF COMPETITION

by JOHN BALL

☆ ☆ ☆

All mystery fans, which is to say practically the whole population, must be delighted by the fine new mystery series now being shown on PBS television. Produced in England, (or so it would certainly appear) these delightful shows include some fine material. Near the top is the quartet of episodes featuring *Rumpole of the Bailey*, a completely wonderful barrister who doesn't care a wig for the conventions, drinks gin, threatens to retire, and then carries off his cases in fine style. John Mortimer's book of the same name is a Penguin original. This treasure can be yours for \$2.95 and don't you dare miss it. Also coming up in the TV series is Peter Lovesey's chilling Victorian mystery *Waxwork* which Penguin has also just produced. The price is even less (\$2.25) and if you don't have the Pantheon hardback you will certainly want the reprint. Since Penguin's are widely distributed you should have no trouble in finding these. And don't miss the TV series which was made possible by Mobil.

While on the subject of mystery fans, collectors who have files of the late, much lamented *Saint Mystery Magazine* will be heartened to know that John Nieminski has compiled a complete author and title index covering every issue published. Mr. Nieminski also gave us his valuable index to the first 350 issues of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. The *Saint Magazine Index* can be had from Cook & McDowell Publications, 3318 Wimberg Avenue, Evansville, Indiana 47712. \$6.75 postpaid.

☆ ☆ ☆

If you have not yet discovered Arthur Maling's fine series of mysteries featuring Brock Potter of Price, Potter, and Petacque, you can start out with *The Koberg Link*, the newest entry and also the finest. This is a very good book with excellent portraits of some elderly people who were once jet setters. The story is superior and entirely believable as financial

advisor Potter finds himself once more in the position of having to solve a homicide. He does so with such style that the book is a clear standout. Lew Archer fans who bemoan the fact that the new appearances of their hero are all too infrequent can safely turn to Mr. Maling for fine entertainment of a similarly high quality. (Harper and Row, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Noah Webster, who is the prolific Scotsman Bill Knox, has turned out another of his workmanlike jobs in *Incident in Iceland*. Investigator Jonathan Gault is sent to Iceland to relieve Her Majesty's government of an embarrassment: a recently deceased lady of firm patriotic principles left her estate to the Queen. The legacy includes a large share in an internal Icelandic airline that is reputed to be in the liquor smuggling business. When Gault arrives on the scene he finds far more than he expected; before he clears it all up there is plenty of action at a swift and rewarding pace. Not a masterpiece of the genre, but a fine book for a wet and dispirited evening when a little escapism is in order. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Also from Doubleday is *Celebration for Murder* by Ruth Wissmann. If you long for a book

that returns to the writing style of the twenties, here you are with a good dash of HIBK (Had I But Known) for added flavor. To quote: "How seldom we know what tomorrow holds for us." All of the traditional props are here, including the old dark house by the sea in which, at frequent intervals, the heroine screams and screams while she dreams of a past life during which she helps another girl commit some playful murders. Strictly a book for the ladies who would like to flashback to a different era. (Doubleday, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Dodd Mead has made available the book, or script, for the highly praised musical thriller *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. This is the engaging story in which the barber eliminates his enemies by cutting their throats while at the same time greatly improving the quality, if not the desirability, of Mrs. Lovett's meat pies. The hardcover book includes all the dialogue, the lyrics, and scenes from the stage production. Of particular interest to those who have seen the show — or who plan to do so. (Dodd Mead, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

There is a certain breed of mystery, presumably designed for the ladies, which features a

heroine endowed with the ability to make every mistake in the book. Usually she is testy, frequently difficult, and regrettably a numbskull. She plunges into situations which she is entirely unqualified to meet and refuses the help of those who try to lend a hand. *The October Cabaret* by Erica Quist is just such a book. This time our heroine is a Canadian who inherits a small antique shop in England and resolves to operate it without knowing anything whatever about the trade. This does not prevent her from occasional flashes of unexpected, and unexplained, knowledge in very specialized areas. There is a love interest and she messes that up too. Not, we fear, quite our cup of tea. (Double-day Crime Club, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Mr. Robert Upton, the author of *A Golden Fleecing* is well aware that some readers thrive on a lot of action and plot complications. He delivers in spades through the use of a fairly familiar set up: a crooked capitalist is manipulating stocks from his castle in Switzerland. An inquiring reporter and his girl friend set out to investigate. Before the dust settles there are multiple deaths, lots of gore, and a full supply of villains which include members of the Mafia, the henchman of the swindler, the CIA, and, for a refreshing addition, the State Department. No

one can be trusted, everyone is out for his own piece of the action, and the undertaker does a thriving business. The plot is definitely overblown, but the writing is lively and the final solution will satisfy most readers. (St. Martin's Press, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Veteran crime novelist Josephine Bell turns to the subject of literary plagiarism in her latest book *Treachery in Type*. A successful lady novelist who has not produced a book in forty years decides in her later years to write once more in the hope of earning some needed income. She hires a girl typist who is exceptionally attractive and utterly ruthless. This little bitch (there is no other word) makes an extra carbon and while the author is on an extended visit to Italy publishes the book as her own work. This should lead to some real fireworks, but disappointingly there is talk of compromises when the crime is discovered. Because the typist made a few slight changes it is felt she has some claim, an attitude that will certainly make every working author grind his or her teeth. Perhaps Dr. Bell knows of what she speaks. The situation is interesting, the portrait of an insanely jealous wife is exceptional, but the book as a whole does not quite live up to its expectations. (Walker, \$8.95) ●

The Lord Provides

by L.J. WASHBURN

He was a cold-blooded killer, and he needed sanctuary.
The church welcomed him!

FRANK CALVADA saw the church in the flicker of lightning.

He was trudging down a lonely country road on a stormy night. There was electrical violence all around in the air, but so far, no rain. He hoped he could get inside somewhere before it hit.

The thick, heavy clouds obscured the moon and stars, making the darkness complete except when thunder crashed and jagged streaks of fire lit everything up fleetingly. Calvada cursed the luck that had put him out here in the middle of nowhere on such a night.

Chicago had gotten a little too hot for him after the Ramsey killing. The cops couldn't prove anything, at least not yet, but they were making things uncomfortable for him, and worse, for the big boys in the organization. So the big boys had called him in and gently suggested that he take a vacation. Naturally,

he had done what they suggested. He packed his bags, loaded his car, and headed south.

It was boring to Calvada, driving through the heart of the country like that. He supposed it was the boredom that had gotten him into this jam.

Earlier in the evening, he had stopped at a little gas station-grocery store to fill the tank. The old man running it had been a real pain, acting like Calvada had woke him up, even though it was barely dark. Calvada decided to shake up the old geezer.

While the old man started putting gas in the car, Calvada sauntered into the office and punched the "No Sale" button on the ancient cash register. He was making a neat pile of the money when the old man looked up and saw him.

The old man gave a yell, dropped the gas hose, and ran awkwardly back into the building.

"What the hell do you think you're doin'?" he screamed at Calvada.

Somewhere along the line of his ragged nerves, something snapped. He grinned at the old man and said, "I'm cleanin' you out, pop." Then he expertly slid the .38 out of its shoulder holster and shot the incredulous old man three times in the chest.

As he stood there looking down at the crumpled, bloody body, sanity came back to Calvada. At least, it was sanity of a sort. He felt no remorse, only annoyance at the stupidity that had gripped him. This would just cause more trouble. He had to get moving before some other local yokel came along. He stuffed the money in his pocket out of habit, went back to the car, and drove off hurriedly, forgetting the reason he had stopped in the first place.

He remembered forty-five minutes later when the car coughed twice and died.

There was very little traffic on this road; he had only seen three cars in the last two hours. He knew he couldn't count on help from that source. There seemed to be nothing to do except start walking and hope he could find another station open somewhere. He put an extra box of shells for the pistol in his coat pocket, locked the car, and set off down the dark road.

The storm began to blow up

after only a few minutes. The clouds scudded in and took what little light there was, and a cold wind began sifting through the trees that lined the road. Calvada felt a brief tingle of superstitious fear, but he brushed it off. He had never been a coward. He was able to navigate the dark road by the frequent flashes of lightning.

When he had gone perhaps two miles, one such flash revealed the little white church by the side of the road.

Calvada had not been in a church since he was twelve years old. His mother had been a fervent believer and had made all of her children go. But the rituals had just seemed stupid to Frank. As soon as he was old enough, he raised such a fuss about it that the old lady merely sighed wearily and told him that he didn't have to go anymore if he didn't want to.

He would go in this one, though, gladly. He felt the first drops of rain patter lightly against his face. He just hoped the place wasn't all locked up.

Not only was it not locked up, it was occupied. As he drew nearer, he suddenly heard the sound of singing over the rushing roar of the wind. When he looked closer, he could see a dim glow coming from behind the stained glass windows.

It was an old church, he could tell that. There was just the one building, built in the classic style out of broad, whitewashed boards.

He figured there was probably even an old bell in the steeple. One thing struck him as funny — although there was a worship service going on, there were no cars parked anywhere around the building. That ruined his half-formed plan to heist one. Oh, well, he could wait out the storm inside, anyway. These country churchgoers were supposed to be pretty hospitable.

The voices inside were singing loudly and unaccompanied by musical instruments, but they quit just as Calvada got to the front door. He opened it gingerly and heard a powerful voice intoning, “ — for all of which we give thanks, O mightiest Lord!” Calvada stepped inside.

One of the floorboards let out a loud squeak.

The light from inside had been dim because it was furnished by a number of candles set here and there around the room. A big wooden pulpit stood on a raised platform at the front. Wooden pews were arranged in neat rows facing it. The auditorium was only about a third full, perhaps forty people. Calvada took all this in as the congregation turned to look at him.

“Welcome, friend!” the voice boomed out. “Welcome to our humble church.” The man behind the pulpit was big, strong-faced, white-haired. He looked like every hellfire and brimstone preacher that Calvada had seen in the

movies. He was smiling with his wide mouth and extending a hand in Calvada’s direction.

Calvada glanced quickly at the faces of the congregation. They looked like a typical group of people, some young, some old, some male, some female, some ugly, some not so ugly; in fact, there was one cute blonde girl about sixteen . . . In the dim light, they looked back at this stranger in their midst, curious, smiling, unafraid.

He felt like he had to say something. “Uh . . . I ran out of gas back up the road. Wondered if I could wait in here till it quits raining.”

“Certainly!” the preacher replied. Calvada wondered if he could talk in anything less than a shout. “Strangers are always welcome. Are we not all fellow travelers in this world? Sit down, my friend, sit and rest!”

Calvada sat down on one of the rear pews. Maybe he could get one of these rubes to give him a lift to the nearest gas station. Then he remembered that they didn’t have any cars. Meanwhile, the minister had gone back to his interrupted prayer.

“O Lord!” he called out, and the congregation bowed their heads. “Hear now our plea to You! Fill us with Your power, Lord, the everlasting power that comes only from You! Yea, fill us now!”

Calvada was looking around the

room, casing it for silver candlesticks or any other religious-type valuables. There was nothing of that sort, though, just a funny-looking cross on the wall behind the preacher. These were poor country people, and this was just a poor country church.

"Hear us, Lord! We are ready to be filled!"

Suddenly the rain, which had been falling steadily outside, slashed against the windows with savage violence. Calvada heard the howl of the wind as it picked up. He couldn't help but jump when the force of it slammed the door open, letting the cold rain come pouring in. Since he was the closest, he got up to close it.

"You are here, Lord! We feel Your power!"

The wind-driven rain pelted him, but he forced the heavy door shut. The place was beginning to lose its bucolic charm. He felt creepy fingers crawling up his back.

"Your bounties are merciful, O Lord! You give us strength and sustenance!"

The preacher's yelling was starting to fray away at Calvada's nerves. The earlier violence and then the walk in the darkness had made him edgy. He almost wished he hadn't come in here with these religious fanatics.

"We thank You for all Your blessings! We thank You for providing the means by which to show our gratitude!"

Calvada sat back down. Some of the congregation cast furtive glances at him now. He didn't much care; he was tired, and he let his head droop.

"In days past, You have provided goats, sheep and cattle. Now You have provided the most wonderful sacrifice of all! You have given us a man!"

What was the old fool yelling about? Calvada heard the shuffle of feet. He looked up and saw that the people had stood up, were now moving slowly toward him. Fear suddenly blossomed inside him. He stood up and pulled the gun out of his pocket.

A young man nearby leaped and knocked the gun from his hand with unnatural speed and strength. Calvada staggered backwards. He grabbed at the handle of the door, but it wouldn't turn. Somehow, it had gotten locked.

"Thank You, Dark Lord!" the preacher screamed.

The blonde girl Calvada had noticed earlier was only a step away now. She smiled at him. A wave of nausea washed over him as he saw her teeth, filed down to sharp points.

The last thing he saw as they closed in on him was that funny, upside-down cross, and the last thing he heard was great peals of laughter.

But he couldn't tell if they came from inside the church, or from somewhere outside. ●

Nobody Loves a Fat Man

by JOSEPH COMMINGS

When the Senator throws his weight around, he means business!

ALL THE LIGHTS WERE ON in the lonely house off Joppa Road, the windows glaring in defiance at the rumbling thunder in the dark Maryland sky. U.S. Senator Brooks U. Banner, fat and sweating, prowled through the silent rooms, searching, muttering to himself: "It's gotta be here!"

The house belonged to a State Department official named Cicero Hill. And only that morning Hill had been taken into custody by the FBI, charged with espionage.

Recently FBI agents had picked up a minor Red spy who used the cover name of Locust. He was a courier, a go-between. Once caught, Locust talked freely, hoping that by confessing they might go easier on him. He revealed that Cicero Hill was a traitor, stealing top foreign policy secrets from his own files in the State Department. Hill would carry these out of his Washington office on a strip of microfilm concealed inside a small plastic

capsule about the size of a sleeping pill. Later, in the seclusion of his bachelor house in Maryland, he would pass the microfilm to Locust.

Hill was waiting for him, confessed Locust, with one of those precious capsules.

This accusation against a government career man was worthless without tangible evidence to back it up. The FBI hurried to catch Hill with the proof of guilt still in his possession. Early that morning they entered Hill's house with a warrant to seize him. He was surprised in his breakfast nook, leisurely reading the morning newspaper and eating eggs ala Florentine and waffles smothered with honey. Whipped cream floated in his cup of cappuccino. He prepared all his own meals, and he had a gargantuan appetite.

He was searched at once. Nothing incriminating was found on his person. The house was

searched. The pellet containing the microfilm was not found anywhere. Hill was ordered to put on his clothes.

Angrily he protested that he was being falsely accused. "You guys'll be sorry for this!"

"Those are the chances we take," was the reply. "Let's go, Mr. Hill."

He was escorted to Washington.

Senator Banner was chairman of a special Senate committee, now in session, inquiring into espionage activities. He was huge, his clothes wrinkled, and when he walked he shambled like a trained bear. He had a big, red W.C. Fields nose, and when he was on the scent of a traitor it quivered belligerently. Impatiently he rumped his mane of grizzled hair while his shifty little blue eyes missed nothing.

Hill was brought into the committee room for a brief preliminary hearing. Hill took the Fifth, refusing to answer any of the questions fired at him.

Banner glowered at Hill balefully. The guy, he thought, must have outweighed him by at least ten pounds. *Tub of lard!* Banner was painfully and critically weight-conscious today.

His cavernous stomach growled. He was famished. That damned doctor had him on a strict diet.

"Nobody," the doctor had said, "loves a fat man. Stick to this crash diet and I'll have you looking

like a movie star. A character actor, to be sure, but still a movie star. Besides, you'll feel a lot younger."

"Nobody's older'n I am right now," muttered Banner.

"Another thing. Cut down on those stinking cigars. They're a health hazard."

Banner had left the doctor's office, swearing blue blazes.

So Banner was in an evil mood for Cicero Hill.

"What'd he do with the evidence?" He frowned. "Swallow it?"

"No," replied a federal agent. "We had him submit to a stomach pump. He didn't have a chance to dispose of it by throwing it down the toilet drain or any other place. He has it hidden somewhere in that house. Only we can't find it."

"Waal," growled Banner, "if it's there" — modesty was not one of his strong points — "I'll find it myself."

Now, alone in Hill's house, distant thunder rolling, Banner had to make good his grandstand play. If he didn't find that all-important little capsule, Hill would have to be released. And as long as it existed somewhere, it could always be picked up later by other enemy agents.

Perhaps they were out there watching him tonight, waiting for their chance.

The diet was bugging him. Always a beef and brandy man

(for breakfast), he grimaced at the thought of 900-calorie liquid lunches, yogurt, and no-cal beverages. He continued his search with a Pittsburgh stogie poking pugnaciously out of his grim mouth. As a concession to the doctor, he didn't light it.

The Justice Department boys had frisked the house thoroughly. They had even picked the lint off Hill's blue serge suit.

"Yet — it's gotta be here!"

Chomping on the stogie, Banner gazed forlornly around the kitchen, then with a reflex action opened the refrigerator. He stood looking into it, drooling, waging an heroic battle against snatching up what remained of a lemon meringue pie. Then he growled with disgust and slammed shut the refrigerator door and stomped out of the kitchen.

The bedroom was paneled in knotty pine. The searchers had turned the bedding inside out. On the dresser top, Banner spied two five-pound dumbbells.

So, thought Banner, Hill made a half-hearted attempt at exercise. Very ineffectual in trying to reduce weight.

He crossed the bedroom. The bathroom was a pool of bright light, its sea-green tiles gleaming.

He stood in the doorway, ticking off the familiar items. Hamper, towel bar, mirrors, scales, toothpaste tube, toothbrush, push-button can of shaving cream, safety razor, sunken bathtub,

wash basin, bowl. The toothpaste tube had been slashed open by the investigators. The boys had even checked the waste traps in the drain-pipes.

Hill didn't use pills of any kind, so the capsule wasn't to be found among other innocent capsules in the medicine chest.

Where was it?

With a big sorrowful sigh, he planted his fiddle-sized feet on the rubber mat of the mint-green bathroom scales.

Magnified by the lens, numbers jumped up at him accusingly. 250, 260, 273.

"Mebbe," he muttered, disheartened. "Mebbe the doc was right."

Stumped, frustrated at every turn, he stepped back off the scales and watched the numbers swallow back to zero again.

Give up? a nagging inner voice asked him. *Give up?*

He snarled back at his own hulking, grotesque image in the mirror. He shook himself violently, then he stared in astonishment.

"Wassamatter with me? That fatso must weigh at least *ten* pounds more'n I do!"

He lumbered into the bedroom, heading for the dresser. He snatched up the two dumbbells, hefting them. Five pounds each. Perfect.

With the extra ballast, he charged back into the bathroom and pounced on the scales. The

numbers spun upward, climbing like crazy, until they reached his own weight of 273 — and then ten pounds more.

He started to chuckle.

Stuck over the number 283 with a narrow strip of adhesive tape was the missing capsule.

Grunting, he bent over. The magnifying lens of the dial was

loose, and he removed it easily. He unstuck the plastic pellet, holding it in his big thick fingers.

Tucked inside it was a tiny watch-spring of microfilm.

"We got 'im!" he crowed. Then he shuddered to think that he had *almost* gone on a diet. "If it wasn't for the fact that I'm so damn fat..."

STRANGE, BUT TRUE.

The most remarkable case of sibling rivalry leading to murder occurred in 1978, with a set of Siamese twins, Tim and Tom Topper, who were joined at the forehead.

Despite their point of coupling, Tim and Tom never saw eye to eye and frequently quarreled, having arguments which led to blows and threats of murder. Finally, in a fit of rage, Tim seized a butcher knife and decapitated his brother before he fully realized the consequences of his act.

The problem he faced as murderer was then not so much how to get rid of the body, as how to get rid of the head which was still firmly fastened to his own. After much thought, he removed the skull and the attached anatomical paraphernalia, leaving only the skin, which he pulled over his own head and face, completely covering it. Not only did this solve his problem, but the inside-out head of his late brother also served as an effective disguise.

The camouflaged murderer went west, to Hollywood, where he became stand in for Yul Brynner, Telly Savalas, and Persis Khambatta, and made a brief appearance as Daddy Warbucks in a road show of ANNIE.

In his recently-published autobiography, *TWO HEADS ARE NOT BETTER THAN ONE*, he confessed to his heinous crime. Using the book as evidence, police arrested and extradited him. After a speedy trial, at which he was convicted, Tim was sentenced to die by hanging. During the execution, however, his own head slipped out of the other one, and he escaped. He is currently considering offers from various film companies who wish to make a movie of his life starring Donny and Marie Osmond in the title roles.

ESCAPE ARTIST

by JOE R. LANSDALE

No prison could hold him — not even this final one!

HE WENT SOFTLY down the corridor, listening.

Stopping for a moment, he leaned against the wall, bathed himself in shadow, let the old body rest.

He didn't hear anything.

So far, so good.

Easing out into the corridor again, he continued, careful to pick up his feet so his slippers wouldn't make sliding sounds. Wouldn't do to alert the guards now. Not after he'd come this far.

He was old, but he still hadn't lost his touch. He could still plan an escape with the best of them.

Like the time he'd jumped Tatesville Prison's Maximum Security Unit. He was in for a bank job then, and they said it couldn't be done. No escape from there. No way by anybody.

He had done it, and done it handily.

Of course, he was young then, very young, and eventually he had been caught. But the escape itself was successful. And for him that's what really mat-

tered. The escape. —

After spending his sentence, plus a bit of extra time for two escapes, he'd settled down and become a model prisoner. But he still had memories of those escapes, and they had been so cleverly planned, so brilliantly executed, that he had become something of a prison celebrity all those remaining years.

And there were things no one found out about — except those he was in cahoots with, of course. He had charted and made escape routes for well over two dozen prisoners over the years, and every one of those escapes, when his plans were followed to the letter, had been successful.

Sure, most of those he had helped were apprehended, but that was something else altogether. His plans had been tried, and they were successful.

He had also been rather picky about who he helped; they had appreciated his genius, even if they eventually did have to come

back. That appreciation kept them silent. No one knew he was the brains behind it all.

He had never helped a murderer, a rapist, a child molester, scum of that sort. He didn't have no truck with them son-of-a-bitches. He had never carried a gun on a heist, not even the one they nailed him on. They had suspicioned — but never linked him — to several others he had been involved in. Just a note, a detailed plan and a lot of guts. That's all he ever had. All he ever needed.

And now eighty years old and penned again! No time to waste on good behavior. Besides, that wouldn't work this time.

Worse yet, he had his own family to thank for this miserable rap. *His son and daughter had pinned this on him, got him sent up.*

He stopped suddenly, leaned back in the shadows of a doorway. One of the guards came around the corner, stepped into the hallway and went by lackadaisical. He held his breath, listened till the footsteps died away down the corridor.

After glancing in both directions, he stepped back into the corridor, went on.

When he came to the kitchen doors he paused. He knew they were locked without testing. He'd planned this caper well. Even made a set of lockpicking tools from all sorts of discarded items

he had been collecting from the trash here and there. He used his tools on the connecting doors. When the lock snicked free, he went through them swiftly and silently.

The back door was a bit more difficult.

The bastards! he thought. Locking him in like this. Why he'd had more privileges in Tatesville. Certainly more honor and respect.

The lock gave.

He went out into the night. His old legs were full of sudden strength.

There were no fences surrounding the place. No guards in towers. But he still might be seen. And if he was caught, it was back to the can.

He went down the drive and out to the highway that ran past. There were a few headlights in the distance, both directions. He crossed over to the other side and stared at the woods that grew there. He could ease his way through them, surface down the highway a bit, and use his thumb. If the old luck was with him he could hitch a ride before sunup, before he was missed.

He looked back at the prison, read the moonlit sign: *Gentle Lodge — Home for Senior Citizens.*

He spat triumphantly in the general direction of the home, turned, and disappeared into the woods. ●

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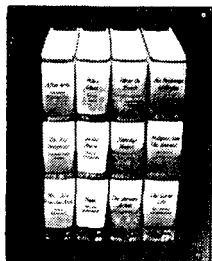
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